

INSPECTION REPORT

LIPSON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Plymouth

LEA Area: Plymouth

Unique Reference Number: 113544

Headteacher: Mr S Baker

Lead inspector: Terence Parish

Dates of inspection: 7 – 11 March 2005

Inspection number: 268848

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive
School category: Community
Age range of pupils: 11 - 18
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 1404

School address: Bernice Terrace
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Plymouth
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Telephone number: 01752 671318
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Appropriate authority: Governing body
Name of chair of Mrs D Macleod
governors:

Date of previous 5/10/1998
inspection:

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The school is much larger than other comprehensives and has a large sixth form which is managed through consortia arrangements with other providers. It is a true community school; very many adults use facilities and attend classes in the evening. It is a specialist arts college and has been so for almost six years. The school is very popular and has increased numbers whilst the number of available pupils in the Plymouth area has been reducing. Standards of attainment on entry are well below average and, socio-economically, the intake is poor overall. A higher proportion of pupils have special educational needs than average and there is a high proportion with statements of need which cover a wide range of learning and behavioural difficulties. There is a small specialist unit for pupils who are physically challenged and the school's specialism in this area is providing for pupils in wheelchairs. The percentage of pupils whose first language is not English is higher than average as increasing numbers of children of asylum seekers have entered the school. More pupils enter and leave the school during their school careers than is typical, though proportions vary from year to year.

The school has the following awards: Artsmark; Sportsmark; Investors in People; Charter Mark; Healthy Schools; Investors in Education & Business Partnership; Investors in Careers. The school is also a Leading Edge School (shares initiatives with others) and a Training School (is recognised as an extensive trainer of new teachers).

Glossary

The term 'Key Stage 3' is sometimes used and means 'Years 7 to 9'. It is often used in connection with national strategies to improve teaching and learning and hence raise pupils' achievement in these years.

The term 'Key Stage 4' is sometimes used as an alternative to 'Years 10 and 11'.

Throughout this report 'pupil' is used in Years 7 to 11, 'student' is used in the sixth form.

This school is a community college. 'School' is used to describe it in the report, as it makes understanding clearer, for example in reference to national standards and descriptors.

The school has a 'Guild' system, akin to 'Houses' in other schools.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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19369	Christine Wild	Lay inspector	
12499	Mary Durkin	Team inspector	English 11-16
23528	Andrew Bird	Team inspector	Mathematics
3735	Alan Webb	Team inspector	Science
8682	Martin Trevor	Team inspector	Design and technology
23080	Robert Isaac	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT)
15404	Judith Tolley	Team inspector	Modern Foreign Languages
31191	David Sylph	Team inspector	History
23324	Sylvia Greenland	Team inspector	Geography
20913	Nick McKemey	Team inspector	Art and design
31850	David Nevens	Team inspector	Citizenship, music
20912	Terence McDermott	Team inspector	Physical education
8096	Nigel File	Team inspector	Religious education
7958	Georgina Lewis	Team inspector	Special educational needs, English as an additional Language, Post-16 English
21806	Pat Swinnerton	Team inspector	Health and social care, vocational subjects
18261	Anthony Hill	Team inspector	Special educational needs physically challenged unit

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a very good school which gives good value for money. Teaching and learning are good overall and pupils achieve well overall; several groups achieve very well, including students in the sixth form. Standards of work, overall, are below those seen nationally; significant social and academic problems when pupils start impede progress. Leadership and management are very good and governors and school leaders have ensured excellent inclusion of all members of the school community. The headteacher has shown an excellent vision for the development of the school.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Large numbers of students are encouraged to stay on at school over the age of 16 and, overall, achieve very well, particularly in a very wide range of vocational subjects, in creative subjects and in history. Provision of work-related courses is outstanding.
- Pupils with particularly low literacy and other skills when they start in Year 7 achieve very well by Year 9. Specialist staff work with such pupils in an often exemplary fashion.
- Pupils who start the school with little or no knowledge of the English language make very good progress in learning it.
- The mainstream integration of those who experience severe physical difficulties is a model of good practice.
- Pupils' overall competence in language and numeracy skills is low.
- Pupils achieve very well in creative subjects such as art and design, drama, and textiles technology.
- Pupils do not achieve well in all lessons and some teachers need to plan better, particularly for lessons in Years 10 and 11.
- Though both teaching and learning are good overall, pupils do not always learn quite as well as they should, particularly in the areas of independent and collaborative work; they tend to be too often reliant on teachers.
- Moral education and social education are promoted well throughout the curriculum and this contributes to pupils' good behaviour in and around the school.
- Though the school pursues non-attendance rigorously, attendance is below the national average overall and too many pupils have poor attendance.
- There are excellent links with the community and other schools, and very good links with parents.
- Careers advice is very good overall and excellent in the sixth form, due to very good provision from the Connexions service and school staff.

Improvement since the last inspection is very good. Teaching is substantially better, pupils achieve better, and the proportion of pupils attaining higher grades at GCSE has, in several recent years, doubled. The curriculum is much better; there are far more successful vocational options and arts-related courses, which form a focus for the school and are very successful. Other issues raised then have largely been addressed, though ICT could be more consistently used and further work done to raise standards of numeracy and literacy.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2002	2003	2004	2004
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	D	D	E	C
Year 13	A/AS level and VCE examinations	E	E	E	

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

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

Pupils achieve well overall. They achieve well by Year 9 and Year 11; students are currently achieving very well in the sixth form. In the main school, pupils tend to achieve very well in creative subjects such as art and design, drama, and textiles technology; they achieve satisfactorily, rather than well, in design and technology overall and in geography. Pupils do not achieve well in all lessons; some need better planning to help them do so, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Achievement is more consistently good in Years 7 to 9; pupils start the school with well below average levels of attainment which improve to below average overall by Year 9 and Year 11. Pupils with particularly low literacy skills in Year 7 achieve very well by Year 9 and pupils who start the school with little or no English make very good progress in learning it. Year 9 national test results have improved faster than the national trend in the last two years; standards in 2004 were below average but pupils achieved well in English and science, and very well in mathematics. The school's GCSE results slumped in 2004, mainly due to ICT results and English literature results not meeting expectations; results overall were still in line with predictions, hence the C in the table above. In 2003 the letter would have been a B, and in 2002, an A. Inspectors judge GCSE results should resume improvement in 2005. Girls tend to do better than boys in Years 10 and 11, though the difference fluctuates and is not extreme. Standards of work in the sixth form are broadly average and students are achieving very well in the subjects inspected.

Pupils' personal qualities are very good overall. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good, and particularly in the very good level of responsibilities they demonstrate in the school community. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good overall; students' attitudes in the sixth form are very good. However, the attendance of pupils is below the national average and that of students not consistent enough.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is very good. Teaching and learning are good overall. They are good in Years 7 to 11, very good in the sixth form. In the main school, teaching and learning are good overall in most subjects. They are excellent in textiles and very good in art and design. Few lessons were seen in drama and in dance but some were exemplary. Pupils with special educational needs are taught very well overall in Years 7 to 9 whilst learning supported by specialist staff is often exemplary. Specialist teaching of pupils with little English is very good across all years. Teaching and learning of citizenship in Years 7 to 9, design and technology overall, and geography, are satisfactory rather than good. A high proportion of very good lessons were seen but a significant number were satisfactory and some were unsatisfactory; best teaching practice in planning for the diverse range of abilities and personalities within classes is not uniform. Neither do pupils always learn as well in response to teaching as they should; some tend to be too reliant on teachers and not confident to get on themselves, especially if writing down answers and ideas is involved. Some students in the sixth form show similar weaknesses in learning but very good learning is more frequent.

The curriculum is very good; a very wide range of courses and extra opportunities is made available. The care and welfare of pupils are very good, as are guidance and support for

school work and careers. Excellent links are in place with the school's partner primary schools, colleges and with the community, and the school has very good links with its parents. Pupils are helped to improve before they start in Year 7 and, if appropriate, placed and supported in appropriate other centres when older.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are both very good in the main school and in the sixth form. Governance is also very good for both. Governors ensure all statutory requirements are met. Though leadership and management by the headteacher and key staff are very good overall, the headteacher has shown an excellent vision for the development of the college and long term planning is excellent. However, best practice in teaching and learning is currently not consistently applied across the school and consequently pupils' achievement is good rather than very good. The school is recognised nationally as a centre for innovations which could be utilised by other schools and also makes an excellent contribution to the training of new teachers. The development of the curriculum is excellent; provision for special educational needs is excellent, and the management of provision for ethnic minorities is excellent.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents, pupils and students are all very happy with the school; they consider that they are well provided for, supported or informed, and that it is possible to make good progress because of good teaching and behaviour.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Ensure best practice in teaching and learning extends to all lessons, particularly in planning to meet the academic needs of the whole range of pupils in classes, and especially in Years 10 and 11.
- Foster more independent and collaborative work by pupils, more thoroughly prepare them for the rigour of academic work in the sixth form, and ensure improvements in basic skills, such as literacy and numeracy, continue throughout their schooling in all subjects.
- Pursue non-attendance even more rigorously and bring to the attention of the local authority the need for more specific support for this issue.
- Further develop the use of ICT by teachers, pupils and students across the range of subjects.

THE SIXTH FORM AT LIPSON COMMUNITY SCHOOL

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is very good. It gives good value for money. The sixth form at Lipson is popular and numbers are increasing year on year. Standards on entry are well below average and standards in examinations in 2004 were well below average. Achievement in AS level examinations and many vocational courses is very good, and in other lessons and work seen it is good overall. Curricular provision meets the needs and aspirations of students very well and the quality of support and guidance for students is very good. Leadership and management are very good.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- A wide-ranging curriculum serves students very well and they achieve very well at AS level and in many vocational courses.
- Teaching and learning are very good and students achieve very well.
- Students receive very good advice and guidance.
- Students' attitudes towards learning are very positive.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form are very good.
- The school actively seeks and acts upon students' views and students take their role in shaping the school very seriously.
- There is scope to develop students' study skills further; particularly to make the transition between the demands of GCSE and AS level courses smoother.
- The management of the consortia arrangements is excellent.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Provision in English literature is satisfactory . Standards are below average and achievement is satisfactory. Teaching is good but learning only satisfactory as students have insufficient skills when they start. Leadership is good; management is satisfactory.
Mathematics	Provision in mathematics is very good . There is a variety of courses to suit the wide range of ability. Standards are above average and students achieve very well. Teaching is very good. Leadership and management of the department are very good.
Science	Provision in biology is good . Standards are below average. but students achieve well in relation to their prior attainment as the result of very good teaching; they lack some independent study skills. Leadership and management are good.
Information Technology	Provision in information technology is good . Standards are average and students are achieving well. Teaching and learning are good and leadership and management are good. The curriculum caters for academic and vocational students.
Vocational Education	Provision in vocational education is excellent . Standards are above average on NVQ courses and below average on other courses. Students achieve very well overall because courses provided meet their needs and

	aspirations very well. Leadership and management are excellent and links with other providers are outstanding.
Humanities	Provision in history is very good . Standards are average. Very good teaching leads to very good achievement. Leadership and management are very good.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Provision in design and technology (textiles) is very good . Standards are well above average. Very good teaching enables students to achieve very well. Leadership and management are very good.
Visual and performing arts and media	Provision in art is very good . Standards are above average and students achieve very well. Consistently very good teaching results in high quality personalised learning. Leadership and management are very effective. Some other subjects were also sampled. In performance studies in Year 12, standards were well above average and students' achievement excellent as a result of excellent teaching; in music standards were average, and Year 13 students achieved well because of good teaching and their positive attitudes towards learning.
Health and social care	Provision in health and social care is good . Standards are below average but students achieve well as a result of good teaching. Leadership and management are good and are improving standards.

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Procedures to help students' transition into the sixth form are very good. Students from this school, and those joining from elsewhere, are satisfied with the advice and support they receive. Guidance to help them make appropriate choices for their future is very good and students are actively involved in providing guidance for younger pupils. Their progress is carefully monitored; any who are underachieving are identified quickly and additional support offered. A recently developed students' union and a 'Learning Focus Group' are providing students with very effective avenues to discuss a wide range of issues particular to the sixth form. Students are esteemed as responsible and mature adults and as such their views are respected.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management of the sixth form are very good. There is a very clear focus on raising standards, based on close and constructive analysis of students' achievement as well as their needs and aspirations. A very effective forum enables students to express their views and the school to respond promptly and appropriately to them. The management of arrangements for provision of a very wide range of courses in the sixth form, through the consortia, is excellent and the curriculum provided meets students' individual needs and aspirations very well. Tutors and subject leaders work very effectively as a team to provide appropriate support and guidance to individual students and ensure all achieve as they should. However, there is scope to raise standards still further by increasing the emphasis on preparing students for the demands of A-level courses in Year 12. Assessment information is used to good effect to set targets, identify underachievement and ensure students are on appropriate courses and are making appropriate progress.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students have very positive views of the school. They feel well supported by staff. They appreciate the very good relationships they have with their teachers and the range of opportunities they have to pursue their interests and to develop a variety of skills. They feel their views are taken seriously and acted upon. They feel that they have an important role to play in shaping the school. They would appreciate a social area that is separate from the main working area.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Standards of work are below average overall in Years 7 to 11 and broadly average in the sixth form. Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 11 and students in the sixth form achieve very well overall, though the picture is complex due to the very many courses offered.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Large numbers of students are encouraged to stay on at school over the age of 16 and, overall, achieve very well, particularly in a very wide range of vocational subjects, in creative subjects and in history.
- Pupils with particularly low literacy and other skills when they start in Year 7 achieve very well by Year 9.
- Pupils' competence in literacy and numeracy is low.
- Pupils who start the school with little or no knowledge of the English language make very good progress in learning it.
- Pupils achieve very well in creative subjects such as art and design, drama and textiles technology.
- Pupils do not achieve well in all lessons and an additional school focus is needed on teaching styles and planning, particularly in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in 2004

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	31.7 (32.0)	33.3 (33.4)
mathematics	33.4 (31.9)	35.5 (35.4)
science	30.3 (31.3)	33.1 (33.6)

There were 233 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

1. End of Year 9 tests in 2004 were below national averages for English, mathematics and science, and below average overall. However, from well below average levels of attainment when they began in Year 7, pupils achieved well in English and in science, very well in mathematics, and well overall. Girls score slightly higher absolute marks in tests but boys in this school typically do better than girls when national boys' and girls' averages are considered. The trend in the school's results is in line with the national trend of slow improvement though the school's results have moved up and down from year to year; the last two years have shown a more sustained improvement. Inspection confirmed pupils' achievement overall by Year 9 is good and it is good in almost all subjects, and very good in art and design; achievement is satisfactory in design and technology overall, and also satisfactory in geography.

Standards in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2004

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	36.0 (50.0)	52.0 (52.0)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	79.0 (90.0)	89.0 (88.0)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	95.0 (96.0)	96.0 (96.0)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	27.6 (31.8)	34.9 (34.7)

There were 234 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

- Standards in GCSE results unfortunately slumped in 2004 and were well below the national average overall and they did not meet the school's statutory targets. However, these relatively weak results were just in line with expectations based on pupils' prior attainment and well within predictions based on the socio-economic context of the school. They were also a little better than the Specialist School's Trust analysis which used pupils' attainment data from Year 7, five years previously. Between 2000 and 2002, GCSE/GNVQ results improved hugely, consolidating in 2003, before the slip. Results in 2002 were well above average compared to those of pupils with similar prior attainment in other schools; in 2003 results were above average. Girls typically do better than boys at this stage though results of both groups were similar in the two 'good' years. Inspectors find that girls are doing better than boys in work but also that the school is tackling the issue through various initiatives such as single sex classes.
- The significant fall in results from the high of 2003 was largely due to two subjects, ICT and English literature, though other results declined too. ICT was a new course which caused problems across the country; English literature suffered from a change in syllabus. Both subjects are doing well this year. A significant minority of pupils take vocational courses which do not figure in GCSE analysis; inspectors' view of vocational provision within the college is that it is very good. Achievement overall, by Year 11, is good though not as secure as by Year 9; achievement in mathematics and in science is now satisfactory rather than good. All pupils, however, follow an arts- or performance-based course and achievement is typically very good in these. Drama was not fully inspected but examination results indicate very good achievement and lessons and extra-curricular work sampled enabled inspectors to confirm this. Most girls also take design and technology; textiles is an aspect of design and technology in which achievement is very good; inspection and examination results both agree.
- Other subjects in which pupils achieve satisfactorily rather than well are geography, other areas of GCSE design and technology, and music. The geography department needs to modify work better to suit the range of pupils' ability; workshop- and graphics-related technologies have suffered from, and continue to be hindered by, staffing difficulties; music is improving rapidly under new leadership and standards are being improved prior to pupils starting at this school to enable music skills to be built up – very few pupils have private music tuition. However, standards in vocal and choral music are high, indicating very good achievement in this aspect of music.
- Good achievement by pupils in this school is hard to attain and often requires very good teaching; pupils overall have significant social problems and many have either specific learning difficulties or weak literacy and numeracy skills. Poor skills in literacy particularly hinder progress in a wide range of subjects; English, science, ICT,

geography, history, religious education, design and technology and music. Very substantial input from adults other than teachers, including learning support assistants, artists in residence, technicians, careers service advisors and administrators, contributes to pupils' learning and hence achievement. In addition, pupils called 'lead learners' help others to achieve better. The complex but efficient way in which all these diverse people play their part to help pupils improve is a feature of the very good management of the school. The added enthusiasm and excitement generated by practical, visual and performance activities, taught by well-qualified and versatile staff in very good accommodation, often leads to very good achievement. Subjects which require pupils to write more, remember more facts and apply them to solving problems, find very good achievement elusive and it often slips to satisfactory in lessons in Years 10 and 11 where teachers are less able to manipulate examination requirements or do not adjust teaching material sufficiently to cope with wide ranges of ability. Absence is also an increasing factor for a significant minority of pupils; coursework suffers.

6. Pupils with special educational needs come into school with standards that are well below the national expectation for pupils in Year 7. Many have reading ages that are considerably below their chronological ages and National Curriculum levels below level 2 in English, mathematics and science. However, the achievement of pupils with special educational needs is very good in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11 as a result of the very good support given to pupils. Various intervention strategies are effective in raising standards and helping pupils with limited skills in literacy and numeracy to attain at higher levels. In the small group and individual work undertaken by teaching assistants within the various rooms allocated for special educational needs, learning programmes are carefully designed and pupils' progress very carefully monitored to ensure that their needs are met as they change. The literacy support work is particularly good in raising pupils' reading ages and comprehension ages from an extremely low base. Pupils who are in the 'Nurture Group' (academic/emotional difficulties) are very well supported in both literacy and numeracy and make very good progress both 'academically' and socially.
7. Pupils with special educational needs also make very good progress in Years 7 to 9 as a result of the level of support and the very good working practices of almost all subject areas. In art and design, history, physical education, and some modern languages and English lessons, focused and well-planned teaching strategies and very effective use of teaching assistants lead to very good progress. There are some subject areas or lessons, for example, geography and aspects of design and technology, where pupils with special educational needs do not make sufficient progress as teachers do not adapt resources and pupils have insufficient support.
8. At present there are 82 pupils / students for whom English is not their first language, 18 mother tongues are represented and 48 pupils / students receive some support for English as an additional language. Their language acquisition varies from no prior English to fluent and competent speakers and listeners. The Ethnic Minority Achievement Support (EMAS) team carefully assesses the needs of those pupils and students for whom English is not their first language and have a range of strategies for developing competency. The progress of these pupils and students is impressive; it is carefully documented and all subject teachers have access to the levels that have been achieved. The school has employed two teaching assistants who work with the EMAS team, one of whom is bi-lingual. Pupils are encouraged where possible to enter GCSE examinations in their mother tongue and are well supported by the school.

Sixth form

Standards in GCE A/AS level and VCE examinations at the end of Year 13 in 2004

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	83.3 (82.1)	92.3 (92.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	10.5 (6.8)	36.2 (35.6)
Average point score per pupil	150.0 (147.8)	265.2 (258.2)

There were 58 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

9. Standards and achievement in the sixth form overall are hard to judge; there is a huge number of courses, many of which do not fit into standard analysis. Other organisations have struggled with this and are still doing so. However, though the results in the table above are well below national averages, those in 2004 are better than in 2003. From generally well below average attainment on entry, students, as determined by results analysis, achieved well overall. They achieved very well in many AS examinations. Over 70 students follow 26 vocational courses; retention is very good and results for those accredited by National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are well above those seen nationally; some are sports certificated and those are well above average too.
10. Inspectors looked at 9 subjects in detail, including the raft of vocational courses mentioned above. Standards of work are broadly average overall, above average in art and in mathematics, well above average in textiles, and below average in English literature and in biology. Students are achieving very well in art, textiles and history, well in ICT, mathematics, biology, and health and social care, and satisfactorily in English literature. Students' achievement in English literature is constrained by weak literacy skills and an inability to study independently; the department is now tackling these problems. Lack of independent study skills also affects standards in biology.
11. Given the difficult backgrounds many students come from (76 per cent receive educational maintenance allowance) and the high proportion who are very successful in vocational courses, inspectors find achievement in the sixth form, overall, is currently very good.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes to school are good, and in the sixth form are very good. Pupils' interest in activities and school life is very good. Pupils' willingness to take responsibility is very good. The very good relationships between pupils and staff make a significant contribution to developing the good behaviour of pupils. Pupils' personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is very good. Attendance is unsatisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Behaviour, in and around the school, is good overall.
- The range of opportunities for fulfilment and good relationships between pupils and staff and between each other result in pupils enjoying their school.
- Opportunities for developing skills in taking responsible roles are very good.
- Opportunities for pupils' personal development are very good.
- Moral education and social education are promoted well throughout the curriculum.
- Too much litter is dropped in the school grounds.
- Attendance is below the national median.

Commentary

12. Good attitudes identified at the last inspection are still evident throughout the school. The school generates a wealth of enjoyment in sporting and artistic creativity that ensures that pupils are interested in taking part in activities and has a positive effect on their wanting to learn. Pupils say they are happy to be at school and they are involved in all aspects of school life. Pupils show good levels of maturity, which can be seen in tutorials and in the Students' Voice Committee. They respond well to responsibility, with older pupils taking on the role of peer counselling, mediators and mentoring younger pupils. 'Lead learners' across the age groups can be seen actively encouraging other pupils' participation in lessons. They also assist primary school pupils in subjects such as music and French. Pupils in wheelchairs have very good attitudes to the school, and appreciate how well they are included in activities, including residential visits, and how they are helped to learn.
13. The school expects pupils to achieve well and to do their best, and most teachers create a desire to learn. When teaching is good or better pupils listen carefully and apply themselves well, but in weaker lessons, their interest often wanes and they become restless and fidgety. This switch also occurs when activities change from the practical to the theoretical, for example, from watching an interesting presentation in history to writing about it. A wide range of activities and clubs available before and after school and at lunchtime is well taken up by pupils and builds on their confidence and self-esteem, raising their aspirations as well as furthering their enjoyment of school.
14. The majority of pupils are polite and friendly, show consideration for others and contribute effectively to an orderly environment. However, the amount of litter strewn by pupils inside and outside buildings is unacceptable and is an anomaly as buildings and resources are otherwise very well respected; work needs to be done to address this weak aspect of pupils' attitudes. The school guilds successfully employ 'Behaviour for Learning Policy' and along with the staff expectations of high standards of behaviour, this results in good behaviour in and around the school. The policy is popular with pupils, who value its clarity and even-handed delivery. However, a few pupils seem unable to behave when faced with long queues for the dining hall and in the grounds when they think they are unobserved. Although parents and pupils report that some bullying takes place they feel the school deals with instances quickly and appropriately; no bullying was seen or identified to inspectors during the inspection. Exclusions are lower than average; this reflects the success of the code for behaviour. The school has a strong commitment to the teaching of the understanding of human diversity. Through this work an ethos of tolerance and respect for others has evolved, and relationships between staff and pupils, and between pupils themselves, are very good. No evidence at all of any race-related problems was seen during the inspection. Pupils from minority ethnic groups often transfer to this school because of its high reputation for tolerance within an area which has seen increasing tensions following placements of asylum seekers.

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
880	31	4
1	0	0
6	2	0
6	2	0

Mixed – White and Black African	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	1	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	5	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	3	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	6	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	9	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	14	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	7	0	0
Black or Black British – African	4	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	4	0	0
Chinese	1	0	0
Any other ethnic group	27	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	429	0	0

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

15. The school makes a strong contribution to the development of pupils' personal qualities. For example, the assembly programme and thought for the day provide prayer or reflection to meet collective worship requirements and inform pupils about topics such as human rights, compassion, racial justice and the stereotyping of refugees. More formal religious festivals such as Ramadan and the Chinese New Year are not marked. Assemblies reflecting on responses to the Tsunami were highly effective. Striking performance arts provided an atmospheric production with relevant reflective commentary by pupils from the school's Christian Union, remarking that compassion should not be confined to responding only to huge disasters. The spirituality became intense as a letter was read from a family, with siblings in the school, who had been affected by the disaster.
16. The specialist focus on performing arts provides significant moral and cultural development opportunities and the school's equalities initiatives enable pupils to develop a strong awareness of Britain as a multicultural, multi-faith society, as exemplified in the conference on refugees for pupils in Year 9. Pupils take their understanding into the wider community in Plymouth, by participating, for instance, in the Racial Equality Council's 'Celebrating Difference' youth event. Unusual examples of spirituality include a modern foreign languages nurture group where pupils experienced intense joy in their capability in speaking French, and pupils who have developed a Teen Angels safety group to help pupils using the Internet. Art also makes a strong contribution through exploration of mood, colour, music and personal identity.
17. Moral and social education is promoted very well in subjects such as religious education and integrated humanities, where moral teachings from religion are related to controversial moral issues and pupils are encouraged to discuss how they plan to live their lives. Vocational education provides strong individual and social development. Staff provide good role models of how to behave, what is right and wrong, how to relate to people and respect for similarities and differences in people's personal cultural and religious beliefs. There is still some unevenness in provision; for instance, missed opportunities in design and technology and geography mean that these subjects do not satisfactorily develop either spirituality or the cultural aspects which are a central part of their contribution to the aims of the National Curriculum.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year 2003/04 (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	8.7
National data	6.9

Unauthorised absence	
School data	0.7
National data	1.1

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

18. Attendance at the school is below the national median. The majority of pupils attend school regularly, a few pupils take extended holidays in term time and a minority of pupils have poor attendance which contributes to lowering the attendance figures (around 100 have attendance no better than 80 per cent). The school makes a concerted effort to ensure that it receives reasons for absence and consequently the rate of unauthorised absence at the school is broadly in line with the national median. The attendance officer and guild assistants work closely with outside agencies to improve attendance and to improve the punctuality of the few pupils who habitually arrive late to school. Most pupils arrive on time to school and a significant number arrive early to take part in activities or to have a cooked breakfast. This school is not seen by the local education authority as having an attendance problem overall and the education welfare officer has a case load across a number of schools; the number of pupils with severe attendance problems is such to warrant dedicated welfare support. Similarly, the school has a relatively high proportion of pupils with severe social problems and has to spend too much time chasing social services case workers; dedicated case-workers based in the school would be more efficient.

Sixth form

19. Students' attitudes to learning and behaviour in the sixth form are very good. Students are mature articulate adults who take part in every aspect of school life. The majority of students are very good role models for younger pupils and are involved in a wide variety of roles of responsibility, such as 'Youth Parliaments', The College Council and the introduction of the Global Institute for Student Aspirations. Some students take a lead role in the after-school 'Drop In and Learn' sessions for younger pupils who can access their help with work or homework. Students have very positive attitudes to the sixth form; they are interested in their work and are eager to achieve well. However, attendance in the sixth form follows a similar pattern to the main school and absence is too high; more rigorous monitoring by the school is improving attendance. Year 12 students, or at least three-quarters of them, are also in receipt of government education maintenance grants which pay them around £30 each week for being in the sixth form; their attendance has to be good before they can receive the money and this is undoubtedly helping attendance. Year 13 students do not qualify for this money this year so their attendance is a little patchier though most in Year 13 are dedicated to following a two-year course. Over 70 students attend vocational training at other sites and their attendance is good and strictly monitored by the school.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is very good. Though teaching and learning are good overall all other facets of provision in this complex school are at least very good. These are: academic and pastoral care, guidance and support, links with parents, and the curriculum. Partnerships with other educational providers and with the community are excellent.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are both good overall. They are good overall in Years 7 to 11, and very good in the sixth form. Assessment is good across all years.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning in textiles are excellent; in art and design they are very good. Drama and dance were less thoroughly inspected but it is obvious that each has exemplary teachers.
- Pupils with special educational needs are taught very well in Years 7 to 9; work with specialist staff is often exemplary and assessment is very good.
- Though both teaching and learning are good overall, learning is weaker than teaching, particularly in the areas of independent and collaborative work by pupils and students; they tend to be too often reliant on teachers.
- A significant proportion of teaching and learning is satisfactory and a small proportion unsatisfactory due, in the main, to relatively weak planning.
- The teaching of English as an additional language is very good in all years and assessment in this area is excellent.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall in design and technology, geography, and, in Years 7 to 9, citizenship.
- In the sixth form, teaching and learning are very good in mathematics, biology, art, history, textiles, and across a wide range of vocational courses.
- There is scope to further develop better use of ICT by teachers, pupils and students across the school.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 166 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
7 (4%)	42 (25%)	72 (43%)	38 (23%)	7 (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.

20. Lessons seen during the inspection reflect good teaching and learning overall and confirm the broader judgements made by inspectors, which take into account pupils' and students' written work and their success in tests and examinations. There was a high proportion of very good or better lessons seen compared to the 2004 norm in secondary schools, particularly in Years 7 to 9 and in the sixth form. Teachers have to work hard to get pupils, many of whom start at low levels of understanding and may also carry social problems, to learn. Teachers are helped by a very large number of effective teaching assistants; pupils are also usefully helped by 'lead learners' - able pupils who support those having some difficulties. The best lessons were almost always associated with plenty of practical activity, by the teacher or pupils; they occurred across a wide range of subjects so most teachers are close to best practice which they can emulate. Art and design lessons were most consistently very good and pupils' learning benefited, as textiles lessons do, from the two artists in residence who work very well with pupils to both raise standards and modify attitudes. Assessment in art and design is very good and enables smooth progression from year to year, building pupils' skills consistently and appropriately, so leading to comparatively high standards. Textiles was not specifically inspected in Years 7 to 11 but the large numbers of excellently behaved and actively engaged pupils producing work of bewildering range and style is testament to excellent teaching. Drama lessons were seen but drama was not fully inspected; lessons seen were at least very good and indicated that drama is an excellent aspect of the school. Dance was more briefly sampled but the very high level of planning and organisation and the very high expectations of the dance leader epitomised excellence too.
21. As indicated above, pupils learn best when actively engaged through the nature of activities, for example making bread or taking a role in a piece of drama, or through participation in learning through very well paced lessons which have high expectations and engage pupils in answers and evaluation, as in the best mathematics, English, and science lessons. However, even very good teaching can lead, sometimes, to just good learning; once stimulating starter activities are over and development through brisk questioning has ended, pupils do not always carry through to consolidating their ideas and writing them down. The response to this more formal aspect of work is not always as good as it could be; some lack of confidence through poor retention of facts and inadequate literacy skills means that pupils are not always able to work well on their own or even with peers. History is a good example of a subject where this difference between teaching and learning can be seen. The use of ICT resources to help teaching and learning, though satisfactory overall, is inconsistent and, given the very high number of computers available, not as effective as it might be.
22. A significant proportion of lessons were satisfactory rather than good, and a small but significant proportion unsatisfactory. Lessons which were less than good tended to not fully meet the needs of the wide ability range present, even within 'setted' classes, either by not providing a sufficient variety of resources to support lower attainers or by

not challenging higher attainers through alternative work or questions; inspectors commented about some such lessons with words such as “bland” or “uninspiring”. Pupils most often took little part in such lessons but were content to sit and do what they were told. Some teachers used interactive whiteboards to start the lesson off with a computer presentation but these presentations were not always interesting either; though many boards are in use, very good use of them and the facilities they offer was rarely seen during the inspection. Examples of satisfactory lessons and teaching, revealed from the scrutiny of pupils’ work, occurred across a wide range of subjects but most consistently in design and technology and in geography. Citizenship teaching in Years 7 to 9 is also satisfactory rather than good as non-specialists are currently used and they are unclear about the standards of work expected. The unsatisfactory lessons were scattered across a significant but narrow range of subjects. In most cases, unsatisfactory planning failed to meet the needs of pupils and this either contributed to disengagement and unsatisfactory attitudes or reinforced poor attitudes brought in by a minority of pupils. During the inspection the school was employing more temporary staff than usual due to illness; lessons taught by some of these were unsatisfactory due to poor behavioural management of pupils; these lessons have been discounted but underline the thorough planning and hard work needed to make good or better progress with a significant proportion of pupils.

23. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is very good in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11; pupils’ learning is good across all years. Absence impedes pupils’ progress though teachers and teaching assistants work to minimise the effect. In small groups and individual work situations, pupils’ learning is very good as they receive a level of attention to their needs that is not always possible in larger class groups, where support is not always as well targeted. There are 45 teaching assistants who support a variety of pupils with specific educational needs, as well as those deployed to support subject areas and pupils in general. The teams of teaching assistants work closely with almost all subject areas to provide for pupils’ needs in a number of ways. Materials and resources are designed to assist pupils and the very lowest attainers are given extra support through small group work and individual programmes to support their needs in literacy and numeracy, as well as emotionally and behaviourally. The learning support department ensures that all teachers have access to information about pupils’ specific needs in a variety of areas of learning. Guidance and advice are given in a comprehensive handbook, through the school’s intranet and other specific documents, such as Individual Education Plans and information on specific pupils. The effectiveness of advice was illustrated in an English lesson: a group of very low attaining Year 9 pupils were enthusiastically studying ‘Macbeth’; their knowledge of the play and the characters was impressive as a result of the methods employed to engage them.
24. Teaching assistants are very experienced and well qualified; several are qualified teachers but not employed as such. A number of teaching assistants are undertaking further qualification - NVQ level 3 and Foundation degrees - as part of continuing professional development. The contribution they make to pupils’ learning is substantial, not only supporting pupils but also supporting teachers. They have high expectations of pupils and encourage them through well-directed praise which raises pupils’ self-esteem and contributes greatly to their attitude to learning. One teaching assistant was a FIFA coach and has adapted the rules of football to allow all to play and this was demonstrated graphically in an observation of wheelchair football, where a number of physically challenged pupils were given the opportunity to engage in competitive physical activity. The patience and support given to pupils in the ‘Nurture Group’ has enabled several pupils to be fully integrated in the mainstream as a consequence of the work done predominantly by teaching assistants. Several teaching assistants take small classes to improve literacy and numeracy skills in which pupils are making very good progress.

25. The assessment of pupils with special educational needs is extensive and being further developed to refine the specific needs of pupils. The data available to subject teachers is detailed; Individual Education Plans and language plans ensure that specific achievement targets are set and pupils are aware of these. The continual evaluation and review process by the special educational needs department ensures that pupils' needs are at the forefront of the development of strategies for teaching and learning, leading to their increased achievement.
26. The teaching of English as an additional language is very good in all years. Teachers of English as an additional language are well qualified and very experienced and work closely with both the special educational needs co-ordinator and the literacy co-ordinator to reinforce pupils' English language skills. These excellent working relationships ensure pupils benefit from a complete assessment of their needs and a cohesive and coherent planned development to meet those needs. Assessment of pupils' needs and achievement is excellent and contributes to pupils' very good learning as teaching is very well focused and work caters for the individual needs of pupils. There are fewer students with English as an additional language in the sixth form; students are given good support to improve their academic language skills. When pupils or students have achieved a suitable level of competency from individual programmes of study, most English as an additional language support is in-class; assistants work with subject teachers to develop strategies and resources. This support enables pupils and students to access the whole curriculum. Subject teachers are provided with a comprehensive assessment, together with explanation of the 'steps' which pupils have attained and how their needs may be met. The individual language plans provide very good advice and guidance for subject teachers in meeting individual needs.

Sixth form

27. Teaching and learning in the sixth form largely carry on practice seen in Years 10 and 11 but classes are smaller and most students more motivated than their younger peers. A high proportion of students are dispersed to other centres to follow vocational courses in which they are successful; visits to some of these revealed well-resourced bases with well-informed practitioners skilfully instructing students. Leadership and management of this range of courses are outstanding and naturally influence the very good practice found within them. The same person teaches the very large classes following successful advanced courses in textiles in which teaching is very good overall and lessons sometimes excellent; learning in this subject fully involves students and teaching is often tutorially based; the teacher deals with individuals and works with them on a one-to-one basis.
28. Teaching in mathematics also heavily involves students in the learning process and innovative assessment procedures ensure students know how well they are doing and how they can improve. History teachers challenge students to think and help them develop their research and essay writing skills though, occasionally, some students are left out of debates; very thorough assessment again ensures very good progress. Learning within art and design is very personalised, as in textiles: students are encouraged to develop ideas and the public display of their work, in a professional, gallery style, raises aspirations and is an encouragement to all.
29. As in the main school, there is scope to develop the use of ICT by teachers and students to support both teaching and learning, although the use of data projectors by teachers in biology is very good and helps students grasp difficult concepts.

The curriculum

Curriculum provision is very good overall, with very good opportunities for enrichment. The courses on offer at every level reflect very well the performing arts status of the college. Accommodation and resources are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Provision of work-related courses is outstanding.
- A wide variety of performing arts courses is offered.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs or who are likely to speak a language other than English at home is very good.
- The standard of support and advice on further stages of education or employment is very good.

Commentary

30. The curriculum is broad and the balance of courses on offer reflects the performing arts status of the college. For example, no less than four performing arts related courses are available in Years 10 and 11 and a further four in the sixth form. The teaching week is 28 hours, longer than the minimum recommendations. The school is currently undertaking a curriculum review, which will involve changing the times of the school day.
31. In Years 7 to 9 the curriculum is good; it meets the requirements of the National Curriculum and students also study drama. Higher attaining students have the opportunity to study two languages, Spanish in addition to French, from Year 8. The National Key Stage 3 strategy has been implemented, as has an 'intervention plan' designed to raise standards. In Years 10 and 11 the curriculum is very good, with a very good balance between vocational and academic qualifications. Twenty-two GCSEs are on offer, together with GNVQ qualifications in art and design and ICT, VGCSE in health and social care, art and engineering, and a BTEC in performing arts. Increased flexibility is provided through specially tailored work-based courses for a small number of students who might otherwise not be attending school regularly. The introduction of a wide range of alternative courses of study in Years 10 to 13 provide pupils of lower attainment with positive options and courses where they can achieve success and become more motivated in learning; the GNVQ course in art is a good example of a course which has motivated a group of boys.
32. Citizenship and personal and social education are provided through a combined, specially planned course in Years 7 to 9, and through an integrated humanities GCSE in Years 10 and 11. The requirement for a daily act of collective worship is met through a 'Thought for the Day' in tutorial time, which consistently supports the delivery of an act of worship through reflection. Guild assemblies, which students attend weekly, regularly contain an act of worship.
33. There are some shortcomings in individual subjects which make these areas of the curriculum satisfactory rather than good. More enrichment is needed in design and technology, and history; geography lacks a programme of investigations to teach enquiry skills; religious education is not providing enough depth to challenge more able students in Years 7 to 9; physical education has too much bias towards games.
34. The college ensures equality of access to courses through a rigorous interview and information programme by the pastoral staff, the careers department and the Connexions advisers. The careers department operates an 'open door' policy; all students are interviewed at least once, and again as often as they need in order to ensure that the courses they choose match their aptitudes and aspirations.
35. Provision for students with special educational needs is very good. Access for all pupils to the whole curriculum, whatever their specific need, is available as a result of the level and high quality of support available and the commitment of the school to inclusion. The working relationship developed between teachers and teaching assistants is very effective in almost all subject areas. Regular meetings of specialists are held, and provide an opportunity to evaluate support being given and to review pupils' progress. Close working relationships developed with the EMAS team and the literacy co-ordinator ensure that provision is coherent and consistent across the range of needs within the school. The support for pupils who are physically challenged is very good. There are 14 pupils who use wheelchairs within school and their access to the full curriculum is assured through the support from teaching assistants and teachers and also from their fellow pupils and students in school.
36. Opportunities for enrichment are very good. During the inspection week, over 100 activities were time-tabled, before and immediately after school, and during the lunch break. Many of these have sixth formers running or helping to run them and they offer a wide range of sporting, academic and performing arts activities as well as a breakfast club. Because of the wide choice, many pupils vary their choice of activities from week to week, and attendance can vary from a handful of enthusiasts to large numbers. For example, more than 300 performers

took part in an evening concert run by Year 11 and the sixth form, and which played to a capacity audience. Even in a large school, this range of activities is unusual and reflects great credit on the dedication of the staff and students who organise them.

37. Overall staffing is good. The qualifications and dynamic skills of teachers in the performance and creative subjects, art, dance, drama, music, and textiles, are particularly strong. Large numbers of well-qualified classroom support staff are very well deployed to assist in meeting the diverse needs of the pupils and the curriculum. Technical assistance is very good in all areas where it is required. The EMAS team is well integrated into the school and provides extensive support for whole-school activities, making a good contribution to other culture events and careers guidance.
38. Accommodation to support the curriculum is good. Music, drama and dance benefit from very high quality accommodation and physical education from excellent outdoor facilities. Accommodation in modern languages and mathematics is very good. In most other subjects accommodation is good, though some subject rooms are small. Science is in need of some refurbishment. Accommodation for design and technology is adequate but there is no base room for graphics, which makes it very difficult to lay out and store work. Access to the school buildings for those pupils who use wheelchairs is good.
39. Resources to support the curriculum are good. The supply of books and equipment overall is good, though in several subjects it is only satisfactory. Drama, physical education, music, modern languages and special educational needs all have very good resources. The school's learning resources centre provides effective support for the curriculum and its librarian works closely with many subject departments to enrich the curriculum and support the development of pupils' study skills. The school is very well supplied with ICT resources, both hardware and software, for use across the curriculum.
40. The special educational needs department has a range of spaces available for group and individual work. The learning support base is a hive of activity at all times with half the space used for small group work and the other half to complete individual programmes in reading, communication, keyboard skills and diagnostic testing. A small classroom is used as the 'Nurture Group' base with a number of computers and specific resources for the lowest attainers and pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. A small area is designated for 'Successmaker', where pupils who are withdrawn from various lessons for twenty-minute sessions use literacy and numeracy computer programs independently.
41. There is a small library within the learning support base and resources include a range of games and an effective reading scheme. Pupils also have access to laptop computers to assist with their written work and, for pupils with physical disabilities, to access the curriculum when their disability limits their fine motor skills. The special educational needs department has a number of computers in each room, which are effectively used to support pupils' studies.

Sixth form

42. The sixth form offers a broad and innovative range of courses. Up to 20 academic AS and A-level courses are delivered through a consortium of three local schools. The subjects on offer change from year to year according to the numbers of students and their needs. Currently, approximately 30 Lipson students are attending consortium courses at the other participating schools.
43. The range of vocational courses in the sixth form is outstanding. A separate consortium, The Tamar Valley Consortium, currently provides twenty-three vocational courses, ranging from animal care to public services, childcare, beauty therapy and mechanics. These courses are

mounted according to students' needs, based on their career interests and expressed preferences.

44. Students are supported in their studies through access to key skills courses in application of number, communications and ICT. They also have access to weekly study support sessions and regular reviews with their tutors. Equality of access to the sixth form is established through 'Pathways' careers evenings and pastoral interviews, focusing on the needs and requests of individual students. Students are constantly monitored to make sure they are on the right course for their needs and are achieving as expected. Any students who find they cannot manage to keep up with the work on a course are given the opportunity to change direction. The requirements for religious education are met through a series of one-day conferences on relevant themes.
45. Staffing is very good. Experienced and knowledgeable teachers employ a wide range of strategies to ensure that students achieve well. Excellent organisation and team working underpin the exceptionally wide range of high quality vocational courses to which students have access.
46. Accommodation and resources in the sixth form are good. Sixth form students have good access to space and to information technology resources for independent study in the sixth form common room, the learning resources centre, in subject areas and computer rooms. There is, however, no separate quiet area in the common room. Resources to support subjects of the curriculum are good overall, though only satisfactory in art, mathematics, and design and technology. The health and social care course has no base room, which hinders displays of students' work.

Care, guidance and support

Care and welfare of pupils are very good. Provision of guidance for pupils and students through the monitoring of their work and the setting of appropriate targets is very good. Guidance and support related to career opportunities are excellent. The school takes very good care to ensure that pupils' and students' views are valued. Procedures to ensure pupils' health and safety are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The heads of guilds and form tutors provide a very good structure for the support and guidance of pupils.
- Arrangements for seeking pupils' and students' views are well established and their views are valued.
- There are very good arrangements for the induction of new pupils, for the transition from Year 9 to Year 10, and for students into the sixth form.
- Guidance to pupils on further study or careers is very good and in the sixth form is excellent.
- Pupils with special educational needs are supported very well.

Commentary

47. Central to the work of the school is the care that it takes to ensure that pupils enjoy their time at school, achieve well, and have a broad range of experiences to help them develop interests that will have positive effects on them and their learning. The school welcomes new projects such as working with The Global Institute for Student Aspirations (GISA), an international initiative for developing student aspirations. Delivery of the themes of the aspirations takes place in form tutorials linked to the

Thoughts for the Day. The topics contribute to supporting pupils in their daily lives and ensuring that very good relationships with staff are created, for example in circle time (dedicated time during tutorials to discuss world or personal issues) and in personal interviews. These very good relationships mean that pupils value the way that teachers and other pupils are willing to help them and they are able to be confident that they would listen and take appropriate action to solve their problems.

48. Pupils appreciate the vertical grouping in the school for tutorials; older pupils provide role models and the younger pupils value the support given to them either in work or around the school. Pastoral staff are very well led and work effectively as a team. The education welfare officer, the heads of guilds, their assistants, and form tutors provide very good monitoring of personal development and academic achievement, which ensures that they know their charges fully. Pupils know and understand the academic levels they are working at and towards, and mentoring days ensure they receive individual monitoring of academic achievement. Parents are very happy with the pastoral system at the school and feel that it is strong and consistent; inspectors agree.
49. The valuing and seeking of pupils' and students' views is a way of life in the school; pupils have a strong voice in all aspects of their education. The Students' Voice, a school publication, regularly seeks their views through the guilds; pupils vote on agenda issues for meetings. Items have themes such as 'teaching and learning' or 'successes of the school', leading to pupils having a direct impact on teaching and learning throughout the school. Circle time assists pupils in understanding issues connected with their own personal lives or world issues that can affect their lives in general; they learn to understand others' views and to express their own. Through the links with GISA, the school conducts its own surveys of pupils, has analysed results and is in the process of addressing any concerns that have arisen.
50. The school has very good induction procedures for Year 7 pupils. The eight local primaries that feed the school are fully involved with the school in performing arts activities; demonstration lessons are held in a range of subjects, staff provide workshops in music and dance and sporting tournaments are held. The heads of guilds, other pastoral staff and the special educational needs co-ordinator acquire very good information about pupils before they transfer to school. Regular headteacher meetings ensure that curriculum continuity is in place to ensure that pupils do not repeat work. Bonds form between the Year 7 and Year 11 pupils on the first day of the academic year as only the two age groups are in school. In Year 9 a planned programme is in place for the induction of the pupils into Year 10 and the 'Pathways'.
51. Appropriate policies and procedures for health and safety are in place. Three members of staff have responsibility for child protection procedures, which are clear and follow the local area guidelines; the school needs to ensure that all non-teaching staff are up to date and understand their roles in child protection. Pupils are taught to care for themselves through the curriculum; opportunities in tutorials and the personal, social and health education programme enable pupils to recognise influences and pressures that they will meet. The school works very closely with outside agencies to provide support for pupils who experience difficulties in their lives, for example, the 'Changing Families' project is assisting pupils who have undergone upheavals in their lives. The school takes very good care of pupils with severe physical disabilities. The school's commitment to inclusion has ensured that the specific needs of each pupil with a disability are addressed. The school's accessibility plan is comprehensive and the

'provision mapping' system provides the staff with a very good indication of the resources held in school to support pupils.

52. Guidance on further study and careers is very good overall in Years 10 and 11. The Connexions service is freely available and works closely with pupils. Pupils have access to information through the curriculum to guide them in a wide range of choices for work, places of study and further education. Parents are involved and their views of their children's options for the future are taken into consideration. The Connexions service also takes a hand in improving pupils' attendance and behaviour through related discussions about the effect of both on future employment.

Sixth form

53. Students receive very good support and general guidance in the sixth form and specific guidance on further study and careers is excellent. Students that join the sixth form from other schools are happy with their induction; they are able to get to know other students in the summer schools and settle in well. In interviews with students, they felt that they receive excellent support from staff who are very focused on how to get the best for them. Action plans and guidance on different websites assist them in having clear views of opportunities available. When students have chosen their subjects to study, guidance through monitoring their progress on how to improve and raise their levels of achievement is very good. Very good relationships between staff and students enable students to articulate their views. A sixth form learning focus group has a direct impact on the teaching and learning styles in lessons, revision techniques and how the school should respond to students' needs. Students are very active in the Students' Voice and are able to guide younger students in discussions; they are respected as adults by staff and by pupils.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Excellent links are in place with the school's partner primary schools, colleges and with the community. The school has very good links with its parents.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Links with businesses and the use of visiting speakers are excellent.
- Links with the community enrich the provision for the pupils and the community.
- The school supports learning in local schools.
- Overall, parents receive very good quality information.
- Parents' views are sought and acted upon and almost all are happy with the school's provision.

Commentary

54. In their responses to the inspection questionnaire, the majority of parents were happy with the school's provision; very few were unhappy with any aspect of the areas covered. The school has gained in popularity with parents and is now the first choice of place for their children. Parents help in school and an active parent-teacher association raises good levels of funding. Parents' support for performing arts activities and events is very good, as is attendance at the coffee mornings and progress evenings. The

strong association with parents is beginning to have an impact in raising aspirations in an area that has suffered from unemployment and deprivation.

55. Overall, information to parents is of a very good quality. Newsletters are attractive and interesting and include a very good range of information and celebration of pupils' achievements. Information booklets for parents such as the 'Year 9 Pathways' and the 'Welcome to the school' booklet are useful and well presented; the prospectus is informative with very good information on the extra-curricular activities available as well as academic provision. The governors' annual report to parents contains some attractive sections and meets statutory requirements, with the exception of the accessibility plan. However, parents are provided with good information on the school's access for the disabled in other communications. The school, with the permission of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), is taking part in an innovative pilot on reporting on pupils' annual progress. Reports are in the format of a data analysis with no written statements but parents are able to attend coffee mornings each term to discuss their children with the heads of guilds. Parents are included in the process of monitoring pupils' academic and personal achievement and are able to be with their children on the mentoring days. Surveys of parents' views take place regularly; a recent survey showed that the majority of parents were happy with a good range of provision.
56. The school has an excellent understanding of the needs of the community. The school is a hive of activity in the evenings with an extensive range of adult courses and attendance at courses during the day in the satellite centres is very good. Family learning projects and family support services are available at the school and community outreach programmes and youth workers are active. The performing arts and sports programmes provide entertainment and physical activities for the community.
57. The feeder primary school pupils benefit extensively from the links with the school. Lessons for gifted and talented pupils are provided and activities in conjunction with subject departments enable primary pupils to experience lessons at the school. Work on murals in art, music workshops with 'lead learners' and sports enhance primary links. The headteacher and the headteachers of the feeder primary schools are part of a very successful academic cluster which discusses provision in the schools, and they work closely together to increase pupils' aspirations and attainment.
58. Links with parents of children with special educational needs are good; academic mentoring days have been well attended and productive. Parents are involved in the reviews of Individual Education Plans and language plans. A booklet produced by the department gives simple advice for parents on how they can best support their children at home. For pupils from homes where English is not the first language, other parents can be involved as translators and information from school is also translated into other languages. There are also links with the translation service to ensure that parents are able to participate fully in reviews.

Sixth form

59. Excellent links with other significant partners are in place. Local secondary schools and colleges work in very close association with the school. The local sixth form providers form an exemplary consortium to provide breadth in courses for students. Links with businesses, for example, local shipbuilders and engineers, are very well developed and offer pupils and students vocational placements, a way in to modern

apprenticeships and to employment. The school has formed very good associations with nearby universities which offer experiences of university life. Success is borne out with over a quarter of sixth formers gaining places at university and similar numbers taking up modern apprenticeship places.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are both very good in the main school and in the sixth form. Governance is also very good for both. The headteacher has shown very good leadership overall and an excellent vision for the development of the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Governors and school leaders have ensured excellent inclusion of all members of the school community.
- Strategic planning is excellent.
- Leadership of the curriculum is excellent.
- The school's contribution to initial teacher training is excellent.
- Financial management is excellent.
- Though self-evaluation is very good, teaching, learning and achievement are good overall rather than very good.
- Leadership and management of the special educational needs department are excellent; leadership and management of the physically challenged unit are very good.
- Leadership of the ethnic minority support team is very good and management of provision is excellent.
- Leadership and management of most curriculum areas are good; they are very good in science and in art and design; leadership is very good in modern foreign languages and in music. Leadership and management in geography are satisfactory; management of design and technology is hindered by staffing problems.
- The management of the sixth form consortia arrangements is excellent; the curriculum meets students' needs and aspirations very well and day-to-day activities run smoothly.

Commentary

60. The school has improved very well since the last inspection due to the very good leadership and excellent vision of the headteacher, the expertise of the very effective team of key managers he has appointed, and very good governance. Though standards remain below average overall, pupils now achieve well and have done much better in GCSE examinations in recent years than might be expected. The proportion of A*-C grades has doubled since the last inspection, though 2004 results suffered a dip for reasons explained earlier. Teaching is substantially better and the curriculum very much better. The school has consolidated its arts college status and become a training school (it helps train very many teachers) and a leading edge school (its very good practices have been recognised nationally and it is helping other schools aspire to them). Links with the community and with other schools have become excellent; the school is the hub of the deprived community it serves. It also plays a pivotal role in the sixth form consortium to which it belongs, and this is recognised nationally as an exemplar of best practice. The school has increased numbers on roll since the last inspection by 25 percent and, in a local situation of reducing numbers of secondary school pupils, is full for next year. A very effective physically challenged unit is now based within the site, specialising in provision for pupils in wheelchairs.
61. An excellent feature of the school is the way in which it ensures that all pupils can access the curriculum and receive appropriate support; this feature is very well supported and fostered by governors. Provision ranges from the very specialist provision for pupils with severe physical challenges to extensive vocational links with trainers and industry, so pupils who may be de-motivated by a 'traditional' curriculum have a chance to develop and sparkle; the low level of exclusions and the retention of high numbers of pupils into the sixth form are testament to this feature. A very broad curriculum, with an emphasis on the arts, allows all pupils to develop in areas they choose; large numbers follow the sciences, for example, as well as creative subjects. Very good opportunities outside lessons extend learning and help replace gaps in pupils' personal development as well as academic development. Inclusion extends to the community; evening classes are very well attended, social and arts occasions are fully attended. The large unfenced site sits in the middle of socially challenging estates yet there is no sign of vandalism; pupils and adults value the school because it includes them and makes a positive difference to their lives.
62. The school has not improved and developed in the way that it has by accident. Strategic planning has been, and continues to be, excellent, and has absorbed new challenges, for example the influx of asylum seekers, and new honours, training school and leading edge status, as they have either happened or been aspired to. The school has become an exemplar of good practice in receiving and working with pupils of diverse ethnicity, another important facet of inclusion. Training school status has helped the school ensure good staffing and ensured very good professional development of staff; many teachers are involved with monitoring and evaluating trainees so their own self-evaluation and reflection on practice improve. Such work, combined with in-house training, external consultancy, and research opportunities, undoubtedly contributed to the high proportion of very good lessons seen during the inspection. Opportunities for staff development do have their downside; many are successful in obtaining promotions elsewhere and there is a significant movement of teachers into and out of the college. Very good induction of new staff, extensive support from well-qualified teaching assistants and very effective technical and administrative staff all help new teachers get off to a quick start.

63. Short, medium and long term planning is very extensive and very well handled by all senior managers, who are, both individually and as a team, very capable. Such planning is very well monitored by governors. The school is complex and handled as several mini-schools through devolved responsibilities: a novel guild system (akin to school houses but with specialisms such as sport or ICT) and vertical tutoring (registration forms contain all year groups). This devolvement means teachers and managers know their part very well and pupils have a sense of belonging often lost in such large schools. They form bonds with other pupils, staff and subjects, even prior to starting at the school, which often continue right through their education. Innovations in the form of managing both pupils and staff contributed to the school joining the second round of leading edge schools in September 2004 so that such innovations can be more widely disseminated. Self-evaluation is very good and performance data is very well monitored both internally and through the specialist school's trust. Staff performance management is very good and keyed to thorough observation of teaching practice, and is linked to extensive observations, scrutiny of work and analysis of pupils' performance in regular assessments, tests and examinations. However, teaching, learning and achievement are currently good overall rather than very good. Reasons for this position are elusive but certainly linked to the very challenging intake which requires very significant efforts to improve, move on and develop; some subjects and many more teachers manage to move teaching, learning and achievement to very good, but a significant minority do not, and absence of pupils hinders progression too. The school recognises that pupils are most successful in a range of arts based and practical subjects and is developing provision to build best practice from these across other areas of the curriculum.
64. Leadership and management of science and of art and design are very good; the science leader is very flexible in approach, is a very good teacher and has introduced diverse curricula to support pupils better; the art and design leader has created a very inclusive department and non-teaching staff are very well integrated into teaching and learning to help pupils achieve very well. The leadership of both modern foreign languages and of music is very good; new people have grasped the nettle and are quickly enabling standards to improve, or are at least putting in place mechanisms to enable them to do so. Leadership and management of geography are satisfactory; whilst the actions of good management such as collecting information and monitoring the department are in place, for example, information is not used well enough to raise standards. Though leadership and management within design and technology are good overall, the leader is, and has been, severely hampered by the only significant staffing difficulty in the school and consequently standards in some areas of the department are lower than they should be.
65. Leadership and management of the special educational needs department are excellent. The deployment of teaching assistants and the flow of information, guidance and advice to staff through the various communication networks ensure the successful integration of pupils with a wide range of special needs across the whole school. The working relationships developed between teachers and teaching assistants are very effective in almost all subject areas. The information and guidance provided for all staff are comprehensive and they are well supported in teaching pupils with, often, severe specific needs. The special educational needs co-ordinator is a part-time member of staff who has built a very effective team of teaching assistants and teachers who are wholly committed to raising achievement. Most subject teachers make good use of the guidance and support available. Regular meetings of the special educational needs teams are held and provide an opportunity to evaluate the support being given and to review pupils' progress. Close working relationships developed with the EMAS support for pupils with English as an additional language and the literacy co-ordinator ensure that provision is coherent and consistent across the range of special educational needs

within the school. The support for pupils who are physically challenged is very good. There are 14 pupils who use wheelchairs within school and their access to the full curriculum is assured through the support from teaching assistants and teachers and also from their fellow pupils and students in school.

66. The leadership of the EMAS team is very good. Management is excellent. The team leader provides a very good role model, not only for the EMAS team but also for all subject teachers who teach pupils with English as an additional language needs. The assessment of pupils and monitoring and recording of their progress are excellent. Individual language plans are regularly reviewed and used to determine future teaching and learning. The organisation of support and the deployment of the team and of teaching assistants attached to pupils are very effective and respond to the changing needs of the pupils who arrive at the school, often at short notice, flexibly and swiftly. Timetables are reviewed half-termly to ensure that pupils' needs are being met effectively and promptly.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	5,117,674	Balance from previous year	84,558
Total expenditure	4,936,829	Balance carried forward to the next	180,845
Expenditure per pupil	3,508		

(The balance includes money in hand for site development)

67. Financial management and practices are excellent. Robust systems are in place to monitor expenditure and compare costs with similar specialist arts schools with a sixth form. Patterns of expenditure are clearly linked to the school's priorities within the school improvement plan and a detailed statement is included in the governors' annual report to parents. Day-to-day efficiency continues to be supported by skilled financial management. External audit reports continue to praise the school's finance practices. There is innovative use of the many sources of funding, given the social and economic background of the pupils, so that the school provides good value for money.

Sixth form

68. Leadership and management of the sixth form are very good. There is a very clear vision of the way forward, based on close and constructive analysis of students' achievement as well as their needs and aspirations, and it is clearly focused on raising standards. The head of sixth form has a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the sixth form and has identified appropriate strategies for raising standards. A very effective system for canvassing views about both social and academic matters enables students to express their views and the school to respond promptly and appropriately. Students' views, not only on social matters but also on effective teaching and learning, are taken very seriously and actively canvassed and acted upon; students value this and feel they have an important role to play in shaping the school.
69. The head of sixth form works closely with other providers within the consortia as well as with tutors and subject leaders within the school and within the consortia to ensure students' needs are met and they make appropriate progress. Leadership and management of individual subjects are very good, and excellent in vocational education. The management of arrangements for providing, monitoring and developing

a very wide range of courses in the sixth form through the consortia is excellent and the curriculum provided meets students' individual needs and aspirations very well.

70. Students' progress and achievement are closely monitored and tutors and subject leaders work very effectively as a team to provide appropriate support and guidance to individuals and ensure all students achieve as they should. Assessment information is used to good effect to set targets, identify underachievement and ensure students are on appropriate courses and are making appropriate progress. There is scope to raise standards still further by increasing the emphasis on preparing students for the demands of A-level courses in Year 12.

PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED UNIT

The provision for physically challenged pupils and students is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The very high standard of care and encouragement of independence enable pupils and students to integrate successfully into mainstream schooling.
- The leadership and management of the provision, which has built a model of good practice in the mainstream integration of those who experience severe physical difficulties, are very good.
- Pupils and students show great courage in working hard to overcome personal and social barriers to learning, which enables them to play a full and active part in the life of the school.
- The teachers and teacher assistants who are assigned to the support of the physically challenged provide sensitive, committed and able support.
- There are insufficient adaptive tools and resources to ensure full and ready access to the taught curriculum.

Commentary

71. The very good provision for pupils and students who are physically challenged (PC) offers a very high standard of care that enables them to enjoy full social inclusion in the life of the school; this includes the intimate care of a group of those with more complex needs. It is a model of good practice. The school is accessible to all those who use wheelchairs, although some narrow corridors have still to be modified and not all doors have an enlarged two-way opening facility. The awareness and understanding of those who are physically challenged are shared throughout the school, and this ensures that there is always support should difficulties be encountered.
72. The teacher in charge of the provision is a very experienced manager of pupils and students who have special educational needs, having co-ordinated the whole-school provision for such youngsters prior to setting up the specialist PC provision. He leads a large team of qualified and experienced teaching assistants whose sensitive, committed and able support is at the heart of the provision. A part-time teacher is employed to prepare specialist materials, such as *PowerPoint* presentations, to enable more needy pupils to access the school curriculum. The provision is very effectively monitored and the progress of pupils tracked through to GCSE and A-level examinations, showing that pupils and students achieve as well as expected and attain examination results in line with their potential. A very effective course of awareness training is given to each cohort of Year 7 pupils, to ensure that they understand the provision that the school is making for PC pupils and students.
73. Pupils and students have very positive attitudes to learning and feel that they have an excellent opportunity to achieve their potential in a socially inclusive setting. They show considerable courage in facing up to their personal and social challenges and are an inspiration to the rest of the school.
74. Subject areas such as textiles and physical education have bought in adaptive resources and staff make every provision available to ease access. However, some subject areas are difficult to access because of the lack of equipment such as rising sinks, desks and ovens.

WORK-RELATED LEARNING

Provision of work-related learning (WRL) opportunities for pupils and students is **very good**; it meets statutory requirements.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Opportunities for WRL outside the college are very good.
- The support of staff both within the college and from the Connexions service, for careers advice, is highly beneficial to pupils and students.
- The curriculum offers many vocational courses and includes vocational concepts in other subjects.

Commentary

75. The programme for WRL has been carefully planned so as to include all pupils and students. Opportunities are made available for them to become engaged in appropriate activities from Year 9 onwards and it is possible to vary the amount of involvement according to the individual. A powerful feature of the programme involves the greater opportunities extended through links with other providers. Courses that are distinctly vocational in their context are available for study from Year 10 onwards. Some of this provision requires pupils and students to go off-site, and this brings its own learning experience for those involved. Local industries are very well involved with the school's vocational provision, including supporting courses such as the vocational GCSE in engineering.
76. Pupils receive very good careers guidance including interviews with staff of the Connexions service. The combined support offered by this service and the very effective resources in the learning resources centre allow students to get individual support when required. Work experience is provided over two weeks and is very well monitored, with pupils evaluating their own experiences of it.
77. WRL appears within the Key Stage 4 curriculum through six specific vocational courses available to all, extended WRL provided for some otherwise disaffected pupils, and parts of other lessons when appropriate. For example, pupils in Year 8 study issues in design and technology around bread making and its subsequent resale; points that occur when making on a small scale turns into manufacturing are covered effectively by teachers. There are around 26 vocational courses in the sixth form and many students follow courses leading to modern apprenticeships.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are improving because of good teaching and learning.
- Work is well matched to pupils' needs, leading to good achievement.
- Boys are not doing as well in GCSE examinations as girls.
- Some pupils are not aware of their standard of work or how to improve it.
- Good leadership leads to a good curriculum, especially in pupils' understanding and knowledge of their community.

Commentary

78. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Standards have risen and teaching and learning are better. Achievement is now good and literacy skills have improved. The relatively new head of department recognises that pupils' listening skills are still too weak and has planned strategies to improve them.
79. The school's national test results at the end of Year 9 in 2004 were similar to the below average results in 2003. The school's trend in these results over the last three years is one of gradual improvement in line with the national trend. Results in 2004 agree with the standard of work seen. The department continues to stress the importance of literacy skills and concentrates on raising standards. Test results in 2004 were much better than those in similar schools.
80. GCSE English language results in 2004 were well below average, compared to those in all schools. The proportion of pupils attaining an A*-C grade was well below average. The proportion of pupils attaining an A*-G grade was below average. When compared to similar schools, GCSE results were, overall, as good as might be expected. Boys' results were lower than girls' results. A history of temporary staffing and below average attendance by pupils has adversely affected pupils' work and the trend in results over the last three years is inconsistent. Results in 2004 were similar to those in 2003 for English language but much lower in English literature, which most pupils also take; literature results were very low. Changes in examination details for English literature appear to have been unproductive.
81. By Year 9, pupils achieve well. They can write detailed narrative stories, read and empathise with characters and present their work with pride. Occasionally, they cannot speak and listen appropriately or write critically. Standards of literacy are very low when pupils enter the school and hinder achievement. Concentrated work to improve basic skills has resulted in improving pupils' literacy standards. Pupils continue to

achieve well overall in Years 10 and 11 although girls do better than boys. The department is aware of this and is focusing on the achievement of boys by targeted lesson planning and dedicated schemes of work. By Year 11, pupils can write and speak descriptively and imaginatively. However, they cannot always listen appropriately and tend to read just for a specific purpose rather than widely. There is comparatively little high quality, analytical and critical writing.

82. Pupils with special educational needs, including the most able, make good progress because work is well planned to match their needs and they are well supported. Pupils whose first language is not English at home make good progress because of good, individual support and shared planning with subject teachers.
83. Teaching and learning are good overall in all years. In Year 7 a very good lesson on the class novel inspired pupils because of the teacher's high expectations, exciting stimulus and obvious care for pupils' needs. An excellent Year 9 lesson involved pupils in enjoyable, hard working activities exceptionally well planned by the teacher and support assistant. In contrast, an unsatisfactory lesson in Year 8 failed to address pupils' disaffection at a series of temporary staff and the objectives of the lesson were not met. In Year 11, a good lesson targeted examination requirements and motivated pupils to achieve. In contrast a satisfactory lesson depended too much upon the teacher and pupils were comparatively passive. ICT is used to improve the presentation of work effectively although it is not a feature of draft work. Clearly targeted lessons to improve basic skills are a prime concern of the department and have succeeded in improving reading and writing. Assessment is satisfactory. Although there are examples of detailed, helpful marking, this is inconsistent and some pupils wait too long before their work is marked. Not all pupils are aware of their standards or how to improve.
84. Leadership and management are good overall. Leadership is good and management is satisfactory. The relatively new head of department has a strong vision for the improvement of the department which is made more difficult because of a history of temporary staff. She has, nevertheless, created a loyal and hard working team. Management is not as strong as leadership because systems of assessment are not consistent in practice and monitoring and evaluation are inconsistent. The curriculum is good. The inclusion of drama adds to pupils' confidence and understanding of plays, and citizenship is planned to develop reflection, tolerance and thought. Pupils are aware of their responsibilities to themselves and the wider community.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

85. Pupils' reading and writing standards are weak when they enter the school and the school takes this seriously. Consequently there is an improvement in these skills by the time pupils leave the school. Speaking and listening standards are not improved to the same degree and the school recognises this as a priority. Subjects undertake the teaching of basic literacy skills conscientiously as a means of improving standards. A range of texts, in most subjects, encourages the use of technical and specialist vocabulary, especially in drama, music and English. The library is generally well stocked but has insufficient texts to support all subjects. The English department has dictionaries available in most classrooms and key words are displayed prominently to familiarise pupils with them. Carefully censored Internet access allows pupils to research topics in detail. This is seen to particularly good effect in music and improves the development of reading, information retrieval and independent study skills. Pupils discuss their work enthusiastically, but not always appropriately, in most subjects and,

occasionally, do not respect their peers and staff by listening attentively. Reading fluency is encouraged and seen to particular effect in English and history. Generally, however, pupils read because they have to, not because they are enthused.

Modern foreign languages

The main focus of the inspection was French. **Spanish** was sampled; a Year 10 lesson was seen and the written work of pupils in Years 8 to 11 was analysed. Standards in written work were average. This represents very good achievement in relation to pupils' prior attainment. In the Year 10 lesson standards were average; pupils achieved very well in increasing their range of language and structures. Very clear presentations together with very effective questioning consolidated previously learned language and allowed pupils to rapidly identify and apply patterns to describe events in the future. Pair work activities enabled pupils to increase in confidence in using the new structure and challenged pupils very effectively to produce presentations for the rest of the class. Support teachers and the Spanish language assistant ensured all pupils were able to make very good progress and succeed in these activities.

French

Provision in French is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good and enable pupils to achieve well.
- Pupils' attitudes towards their learning are positive and behaviour is very good.
- The department makes a very good contribution to pupils' personal development; relationships are very good and pupils are confident linguists.
- Leadership is very good and management good; the curriculum is well matched to pupils' needs and capabilities, and teachers work well as a team but there is still scope to improve consistency further.
- Assessment procedures are good but information is not always used effectively to plan for the progress of groups of differing ability within lessons and raise standards further.
- There is scope to increase opportunities for pupils to use the language themselves and to use real-life situations to raise standards further.

Commentary

86. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Standards in French have improved though are below average overall. Improvement over the last year has been particularly significant; there are clear indications of rising standards in Year 7 in particular. New, very good leadership and good management have resulted in a good degree of consistency in the quality of teaching and learning but there is still scope to improve this further.
87. GCSE results in 2004 were well below average compared to those in all schools. The proportion of pupils attaining an A*-C grade was well below average. This was a significant decline from previous years. However, since the school enters a greater proportion of pupils for examination than is the case nationally, results represent satisfactory achievement, particularly for lower attaining pupils. There is no significant difference between boys' and girls' results.

88. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are below average; pupils achieve well. By Year 9 pupils can describe events in the past, present and future, express opinions and are beginning to give reasons for their views, identifying the main points and detail from extracts of speech and short texts. They display a good understanding of grammar and write accurately using a good range of vocabulary and structures. There is clear evidence of a significant rise in standards in Year 7 as a result of the introduction of more challenging course materials; pupils in Year 7 use a wider range of language and structures and show greater confidence in manipulating the language independently to communicate their ideas. In Years 8 and 9 pupils use a more limited range of language and although they communicate ideas clearly they are dependent upon models to do this.
89. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are below average; pupils achieve well. By Year 11, pupils can write at length and in detail for a variety of purposes, and in doing so they use a good range of vocabulary and structures and link sentences effectively to compare and contrast ideas. However, although their listening skills are well developed as a result of extensive exposure to very good role models in lessons, pupils are reliant upon models and guidance in both speaking and writing. Opportunities for pupils to use the language themselves are often limited in scope so that they are less confident in manipulating the language spontaneously and independently.
90. Teaching and learning are good overall. Two unsatisfactory lessons were observed. In these lessons the needs of pupils with special educational needs were not adequately addressed in lesson planning so that they found tasks too difficult. However, activities and resources are usually well matched to pupils' capabilities and sequenced well to enable pupils to build successfully on previous learning; the needs of the least and most able are effectively addressed in the majority of lessons. Teachers have a very good command of French but do not always use the language effectively to conduct activities so that opportunities to develop listening skills are missed. In the best lessons, higher attaining pupils are challenged to interpret more complex instructions for others. Clear presentations of new language allow pupils to identify and apply patterns and enable pupils to rapidly understand and use new language themselves. Sensitive and supportive questioning enables all pupils to respond successfully. Starter activities are used well to consolidate previous learning and games and pair work activities are effective in increasing pupils' confidence and competence. In an outstanding Year 7 lesson, pupils with special educational needs made excellent progress in describing people. Excellent planning and liaison with support teachers enabled pupils to develop listening, reading and speaking skills confidently. A series of very well sequenced activities and resources which were very well matched to pupils' needs and capabilities ensured pupils experienced success at each stage of the lesson. The emphasis was on speaking and listening throughout, and learning was consolidated effectively through basic reading activities. As a result, pupils' confidence grew rapidly, pronunciation was excellent and learning was fun. In contrast, lesson planning did not take sufficient account of pupils' needs and led to an unsatisfactory lesson in Year 8; pupils had insufficient support and too little opportunity to practise key language and as a consequence they could not recall basic language needed to give their opinions of clothes and had difficulty completing writing tasks. In a Year 11 lesson, pupils made satisfactory progress overall. They made good progress in increasing their range of language in reading about environmental issues as a result of clear presentations of new language and appropriate pair work activities to develop reading skills. However, opportunities to challenge higher attaining pupils and develop reading techniques were missed in plenary sessions and this slowed progress overall.

91. Pupils' attitudes are positive and behaviour is very good. They listen attentively, concentrate on tasks set and work productively in small groups and pairs. When given the opportunity they are keen to take responsibility, for example in leading activities themselves or making presentations to the rest of the class. They have very good relationships with their teachers and are concerned to do well. In a minority of instances they become restless and lose concentration during lengthy teacher-led activities where they are not directly involved themselves or when they find tasks too difficult. When they have had the opportunity to practise informally they are keen to participate in class oral work.
92. Leadership and management are good overall; leadership is very good, management is good. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are good and have been successful in achieving a good degree of consistency across the department. However, arrangements for sharing and spreading good practice are not focused or structured enough to ensure that the excellent practice which exists within the department is spread, in particular to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs. Examination results are analysed rigorously and appropriate action is taken to raise standards. Curriculum provision is good and is constantly reviewed in order to meet pupils' needs more effectively and raise standards. Gifted linguists in Year 11 are actively involved in the department's teaching at the feeder primary school and a more appropriate course has been introduced in Year 9 to enable lower attaining pupils to achieve success. Marking is consistent across the department and teachers make good use of assessment information to inform pupils how to improve their work. However, there is still scope to use assessment information more effectively in lesson planning so that all pupils achieve their potential.
93. The department makes a very good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development, particularly through contact with native speakers, opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively but, above all, in ensuring pupils encounter success in language learning and as a result are confident in their ability as linguists.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' subject knowledge is very good.
- The attitudes and behaviour of pupils are good.
- Analysis and use of assessment data are thorough and constructive.
- Formal monitoring and evaluation of the department are good.
- ICT is underused as a resource for teaching and learning.

Commentary

94. When pupils enter the school their standards are well below the national average. Standards in the Year 9 national tests in 2004 were below the national average as they are in Year 9 now; pupils achieve well. Standards have improved at a greater rate than the national trend and are above the average for similar schools.
95. Standards in the GCSE mathematics examination in 2004 were well below the national average, with boys performing better than girls. Standards were better than in 2003, though the proportion of pupils achieving an examination grade declined to well below the national average. Current standards of work by pupils in Years 10 and 11 are below average and achievement is satisfactory.
96. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11. Teachers' subject knowledge is very good and most are aware of the next steps in pupils' learning, but in otherwise satisfactory lessons, skills pupils are expected to acquire by the end of the lesson are not identified. Lessons are planned very well, though teaching methodologies could be more innovative and interesting. The pupils benefit from the use of the 'mental starters' in Years 7 to 9 and these are consistently applied. However, the end of lesson review to give some understanding of what pupils' know, understand and can do is not strongly addressed. Pupils' attitudes are good overall though their level of attendance is unsatisfactory. Pupils listen and respond well to questions. There is a good balance between theory and practice in lessons and new topics are developed well from first principles. Key words are reinforced and key statements are recorded in exercise books. The presentation of work is overall good though, on occasion, poor work is not challenged. Time is used well to keep the pace of lessons brisk. Pupils learn through application, teacher support and the use of previously taught skills. Opportunities for pupils' personal development that would engage pupils more could be exploited further.
97. Resources that are available are used well, though the use of ICT is limited. Teaching assistants are used very well and enable pupils with special educational needs to progress as well as their peers. Homework is issued regularly and marked up to date, though opportunities to extend the more able are not planned for. Assessment is not consistently used well enough during lessons to monitor pupils' acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding. However, pupils are aware of their strengths and weaknesses and know what to do to improve as a result of regular testing and self-assessment.
98. The quality of leadership and management is good. There is clarity of vision and aspirations for the department are high. Issues raised in the last report have been addressed, though the development of numeracy across the curriculum has not been dealt with sufficiently to help standards rise further. There is a strong work ethic within the department and an emerging team of subject specialists committed to raising standards. Assessment systems, centralised computer record keeping and analysis of data are good. The monitoring and evaluation of the department are well established. However, the handbook requires updating with respect to

policies in order to make monitoring more effective. Displays in classrooms are stimulating and an aid to learning, and celebrate pupils' success. The quality of accommodation is very good.

Mathematics across the curriculum

99. Management elements for the provision of numeracy are satisfactory and the work done to address the needs of the lowest attaining pupils is good, though overall provision across the curriculum is unsatisfactory.
100. There is a whole-school numeracy policy and subject areas are made aware of where numeracy occurs within schemes of work. Specialised training to raise teachers' awareness of numeracy has taken place since the last report. The school's current induction programme of new staff includes reference to numeracy. Information detailing the range of numerical procedures pupils are expected to come into contact with is available to staff. Subject areas are made aware of where numeracy occurs within schemes of work and the quality of provision is monitored through lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work.
101. When pupils enter the school their numeracy skills are, overall, well below average, compared to national expectations. There are close links with the feeder primary schools to improve the continuity and development of numeracy. There are regular teaching visits and there is teacher support from the mathematics manager responsible for outreach work and for Years 7 to 9 in school. Marking and assessment of pupils' work have been standardised between schools. All parents receive a numeracy pack prior to pupils transferring to Lipson and pupils in Year 7 whose numeracy skills are very weak are targeted on entry and receive a planned programme of study with much direct one-to-one support from special educational needs staff. A significant proportion of pupils make good progress. In Year 10 further support is provided for a withdrawal group of the pupils with weaker numeracy skills.
102. The National Numeracy Strategy is consistently applied in Years 7 to 9 within the mathematics department. Pupils benefit from the 'quick fire' mental arithmetic that precedes the main part of lessons. Other departments, notably English, science, music and ICT, support a range of numerical experiences, for example, in science pupils in Year 9 are required to substitute values into algebraic formulae and determine the velocity of particles and the density of solids. In English, pupils question graphs. Many Year 9 pupils can measure, perform simple calculations, interpret information and complete a variety of straightforward numerical operations, though at times they have to rely on the calculator. Standards overall are below average but improving in terms of national test results. However, pupils' competence in mathematics in coping with subject demands across the whole curriculum is unsatisfactory overall. Staff do not take full advantage of the opportunities for co-ordinating and developing the higher order levels of numeracy that exist within schemes of work.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A team of enthusiastic teachers are committed to improving results for all pupils.
- Lessons are well paced and challenging but do not use the full potential of computer presentation methods to enrich lessons.
- Regular assessment keeps pupils aware of their progress, but does not provide sufficient written comment on how to improve.
- Staff have a good knowledge of pupils so that unobtrusive support can be offered to both low and high attaining pupils, when needed.
- Very good leadership and management ensure a firm sense of direction.

- Practical work is well resourced and plentiful, but in laboratories which are in desperate need of redecoration to make them more encouraging work places.
- There is first-class technician support for all aspects of the faculty.

Commentary

103. Much has happened in more than six years since the previous inspection and standards have improved as a result. Improvement is good.
104. Pupils enter the school with standards well below the national average despite end of Year 6 results which show standards are better; ten months after these tests, most Year 7 pupils are not performing at standards indicated by them. By the end of Year 9 in 2004, results were below average and continued a slow but steady improvement over recent years. There is little overall difference in performance between boys and girls, but boys tend to attain better at the higher levels of the test. Current standards of work by Year 9 are below average. Pupils achieve well.
105. GCSE results, although improving over time, are below national average standards. Analysis of the 2004 results shows that most pupils gained considerably better results than might have been expected from their prior attainment, but the most able show a degree of under-achievement by both boys and girls. Overall, there was little significant difference between girls and boys in examination results. Current standards of work by Year 11 are below average. Pupils achieve satisfactorily.
106. In all years, standards of work in the classroom are often better than test and examination results indicate; they are at least appropriate to the class. Written work is usually neat and well presented with large, clear diagrams, and graph work is particularly good. Practical work is tackled enthusiastically with keen competition for acceptable results, and laboratory discipline is good. Pupils with special educational needs match their classmates orally and practically; usually, only the amount and quality of written work they produce identify them unless a teaching assistant is sitting with them. The few physically challenged pupils seen equalled the general standard of thinking and speaking but sometimes needed help with any written work. They were not observed doing any experimental work.
107. The quality of teaching is good and results in learning which is at least satisfactory and sometimes better. Pupils' short retention spans, some minor inattention and partial lack of interest or motivation prevent the quality of learning from exactly matching that of teaching. Many lower-attaining pupils learn a process mechanically, but do not understand what they have done, for instance, calculating speed from data on distance and time. All the lessons seen used computer-generated teacher presentations but the content of the lesson was sometimes very traditional and unexciting. The facility of adding detail stage by stage to an existing diagram was rarely used, and simulations, video extracts and additional sound or photographic enrichments did not occur. As a result the teaching failed to generate the expected impact and did not register with pupils as an exciting event which they would remember together with the facts that had been taught.
108. Practical work is plentiful and is well planned and resourced. Safety aspects are well emphasised and pupils generally conform to the requirements with few reminders. Despite the frequency of experimental work, many pupils lack confidence and want to ask the teacher for help at each step. Pupils' attitudes are good. They ask questions

politely and discuss their work willingly with a visitor but, even in Year 11, some still lack the confidence to volunteer an answer or to offer an idea. This has led to many pupils becoming over-reliant on their teacher and becoming used to being 'spoon-fed'. So they fail to think for themselves or learn independently. The department has recognised these failings and is actively working on confidence-boosting initiatives.

109. Assessed coursework in Key Stage 4 has been identified as an area in which pupils could boost their examination chances, and scripts for assessment this summer show that many have learned from earlier attempts and have improved their personal standards. The pace of lessons is good, with lesson objectives displayed at the outset. However, plenaries at the end of lessons fail to capitalise on the good start; objectives are not sufficiently revisited to see if they have been met and, if not, why not.
110. Relationships are good and pupils are very aware of the code of behaviour and sanctions, which teachers adhere to strictly. This, coupled with well-mannered behaviour insisted upon by staff, ensured that disruptive behaviour did not occur during the inspection. Reasonably sized classes also mean that the teacher can support individuals unobtrusively, whether non-teaching support is available or not. In every lesson the key words that will occur are spelled, explained and displayed, and pupils slowly learn to use them correctly. Especial emphasis is placed on this with lower-attaining pupils.
111. The leadership of the faculty and the quality of its management are both very good. A strong sense of direction and what is needed to get there is coupled with a flexible approach, which leads to unexpected crises being dealt with swiftly and effectively. A strong team supports the head of department, and together they have established a very positive ethos for learning. The recent introduction of an applied science course in Year 10 has proved popular and interesting for pupils as well as providing teachers with good experience for what is likely to be an expanding examination area for the future. Similarly the establishment of a Year 11 class for disaffected pupils is effective and has improved interest and standards. Provision for higher-attaining pupils is developing, and more challenging tasks are available but are not a required element of lessons for these pupils. Assessment is regular and is used effectively to monitor and support individuals as well as to guide future planning. Teachers are very generous with their time and out-of-lesson support for individuals is common and, for example, 'booster classes', science-based clubs and activities, and exam revision groups are provided.
112. Laboratories are spacious but dated in design and desperately need re-decoration to make them into encouraging work places. Good displays of reference material and of pupils' work brighten the walls and corridors, and are well looked after. The good teaching is underpinned by first-class technician support and this extends well beyond the routine activities of provision and maintenance of apparatus.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The overall quality of teaching is good and some is very good. As a result, pupils achieve well.
- Good leadership has led to improvements in provision.

- The department is staffed well, with a majority of specialists who form a good team.
- The expanding curriculum opportunities for ICT suit the needs of many pupils well and have innovative features.
- Resources are very good in the computer rooms and around the college.
- Computers are not used enough in other subjects; there are too few systems with which to monitor and evaluate the quality of outcomes and standards achieved in ICT in subjects across the curriculum.
- A minority of pupils have poor attendance patterns.

Commentary

113. Although there is still work to be done, the department has made good progress in recent years in improving provision.
114. Teachers' initial assessments show that the great majority of pupils have well below average standards on entry to Year 7. The department's own assessments show that pupils make good progress from term to term and, by the end of Year 9, overall standards in ICT are average; inspection agrees with this. Many pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9 because they work hard, have good access to very good ICT resources and their lessons are planned well by their teachers.
115. The standards attained by pupils in Year 10 and 11, studying for the GNVQ award in IT, were below average last year but are now average. In Years 10 and 11, most pupils achieve well. Pupils with special educational needs, including those who are gifted or talented, make good progress because teachers give them work which is matched well to their needs. The more able also do well when they act as 'lead learners' helping other pupils.
116. Pupils in Year 7 have a good understanding of the different functions of word processing applications and have combined images and text in their own leaflets and newspapers. Pupils have used spreadsheets to enter data and formulae and have shown how to calculate totals and averages automatically. In Years 7 and 8, pupils gain fluency in compiling multi-media presentations. They also produce digital advertisements for an Internet café, some of which are of high quality. Pupils in Years 8 and 9 also develop skills in literacy and numeracy through using word processing and database applications. However, their lack of literacy tends to hold back their work in ICT. In Year 10, pupils' skills develop further, so, for example, they can grab images and screenshots from Internet websites to paste and use in multi-media or publishing applications. Their work on a user requirement report establishes a basic competence in the use of the Internet. Year 11 pupils achieve well in ICT, creating presentations which use customised animations and a host of sophisticated, digital imagery. Girls and boys achieve similarly. They collaborate well with their peers. When pupils underachieve, it is usually because of their poor attendance.
117. The quality of teaching is good overall. ICT training and mentoring are highly effective, and some teaching is very good. When teaching and learning are good, it is because teachers know their material very well and communicate their aims clearly in well-timed lessons. When teaching has very good features, teachers provide exciting lessons and tasks, and inspire their pupils to achieve highly. The specialist teachers and their knowledgeable assistants prepare very good digital resources with great care. They explain concepts clearly and maintain a good pace throughout. As a result, pupils usually learn rapidly. Pupils achieve well, as a result of sharply focused teaching, and assessment which is often accurate and consistent. In the few lessons where teaching is less effective, it is because teachers do not manage the organisation of pupils

enough or give pupils enough opportunities to lead their own learning. In a few lessons, teachers do not allow enough time in whole-class sessions at the end of lessons to identify how much pupils have learned.

118. The quality of leadership is good and the quality of management is satisfactory. The department is expanding its provision steadily with strong support from senior managers. The head of faculty was appointed just over three years ago and has set about the many tasks needed to improve provision with vigour. The college network has been improved since the last inspection and is now sophisticated and robust. Many other departments are well stocked with ICT resources such as banks of laptop computers. An effective technical team manages resources well and provides valuable support to teachers and learners. Classroom assistants also provide teachers and learners with very good support in lessons. The department monitors and evaluates teaching well. All teachers have received good ICT training, for instance, in the use of interactive whiteboards.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

119. Though pupils and teachers may use computers effectively for research, for homework and to present their work attractively, this is not consistent enough across the school. Pupils use e-mail to exchange documents and communicate with others and this helps some teachers assess their progress. The school has very good Internet facilities and the website has exemplary features. Teachers' use of interactive whiteboards and ICT projectors is variable and too often, as in science, an electronic presentation of notes rather than a stimulating experience making use of information from a variety of sources.

120. The use of computers and provision for ICT are very good in music, and good in modern languages, geography, religious studies, design and technology, and for pupils with special educational needs. Competence in the use of ICT is satisfactory in mathematics, science, and in physical education. However, ICT is used too sparsely in English, and in art and design and in history in Years 7 to 9; learning opportunities are missed.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is inconsistent.
- Pupils do not get enough practice in carrying out geographical investigations in Years 7 to 9.
- ICT use in lessons and for homework is good.

Commentary

121. Improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory. Although the daily management of the department is smooth and some areas have been improved, such as use of ICT and lesson structure, standards have not risen sufficiently. The

department has, therefore, not effectively improved its performance since the previous inspection.

122. GCSE results in 2004 were well below average compared to those in all schools and to those in similar schools. The proportion of pupils attaining an A*-C grade was very low and failed to meet targets. The proportion of pupils attaining an A*-G grade was almost average. Results for A*-C grades fell sharply in 2004 due to the poor attitudes of a significant proportion of the pupils. For the previous four years they were better, though still below average, showing a slightly improving trend.
123. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are below average and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. By Year 9 the most capable pupils can describe the effects of natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes but they have a limited understanding of the causes of various phenomena. The work of lower attaining pupils is untidy and incomplete, and sometimes poorly constructed sentences make a nonsense of the information they are trying to record. Standards of geographical knowledge and skill on entry to the school, as seen in Year 7 books, are below average overall, but the higher attaining pupils do have a clear grasp of geographical skills such as maps and diagrams. From Year 7 to Year 9 the knowledge and understanding of all but the lowest attaining pupils improve steadily but unremarkably. In these year groups there are not enough opportunities for pupils to develop their geographical skills through collection, analysis and presentation of first-hand data, which puts pupils at a disadvantage when they come to prepare GCSE coursework.
124. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are still below average and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. There is no apparent difference overall between the standards of girls and boys, and the few ethnic minority pupils are well integrated and achieve on an equal basis with the rest of their cohort. By Year 11, pupils have produced some creditable coursework based on a study of housing in Plymouth. They use computer spreadsheets effectively to present graphs and can word-process their work well. However, some of their exercise books show bad work habits, for example, disorganised presentation of information and cursory notes, which give them little basis for revision at examination time, and are below expectations for GCSE pupils. Indications are that the current cohort of Year 11 pupils can meet their target grades, but these are not ambitious.
125. Pupils with a statement of special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall because of the high level of support assistants in classes, who work productively with teachers. However, this level of progress is not consistent for pupils in the 'school action' classifications, because some teachers do not consider individual learning needs or modify work tasks to make them accessible to all. The same applies to the most able pupils, who frequently find the work too easy and, instead of being challenged by higher level work, waste time waiting for the rest of the class to catch up. Pupils who may not use English as the first language at home make good progress and catch up quickly because of the intensive specialist support they are given in lessons.
126. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. One very good lesson was seen where Year 11 pupils were revising and extending knowledge about world-wide locations of economic activity. Because interesting resources and tasks were provided and the teacher's expectations were made clear at the start of the lesson, pupils took a pride in their progress and a very good working atmosphere was established. By contrast, in one unsatisfactory lesson there was a lack of logic in the presentation of concepts about

Mediterranean climates which led to pupils being confused about what they were expected to achieve and because the teacher did not expect the whole class to be silent and listen, several gave up trying to work at all.

127. Literacy is consistently well promoted throughout the teaching. In almost every lesson the starter activity involved defining and clarifying the key vocabulary and pupils were expected to read information on a regular basis. Numeracy is not so effectively promoted; pupils had the skills to use graphs in their presentation of data, but frequently forgot that titles and keys were essential tools for interpreting the information. ICT is well promoted; it was often used to present information and enrich resources, and websites were used for homework research. One Year 7 lesson successfully used a bank of wireless laptops for pupils to work in groups researching and comparing information about a number of different farms in the United Kingdom. Pupils' skills were sufficient for them to log on and make good use of the technology.
128. Assessment is satisfactory. Marking is regular but not always supportive; at times sub-standard work is accepted as being good. Assessment of learning in class by questioning is a regular feature of the teaching. Pupils are also regularly assessed by assignment and as a result most are aware of their National Curriculum level or potential GCSE grade. However, they are less well informed about how they can improve their performance.
129. The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory. Day-to-day management is smooth and effectively organised. Some recent changes in the head of faculty role mean that overall responsibilities within the department are not clearly defined. Although the department has a wealth of data about individual pupils, and there is regular monitoring of teaching and marking, none of this is put to good use in the formulation of strategies to improve standards. Standards are further affected by teaching rooms that are too small for the groups using them, and by a shortage of specialist geography teachers.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching leads to good learning and good achievement by pupils, though good practice is not consistent enough, particularly in Years 7 to 9.
- Strategies to raise achievement at GCSE are proving successful.
- Good assessment ensures that pupils understand their progress and how to improve their work.
- Pupils' attitudes to the subject are positive and behaviour in lessons is consistently good.
- Teachers do not make sufficient use of ICT to enhance teaching and learning.

Commentary

130. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. At that time, the department received a good report.

131. GCSE results in 2004 were well below average compared to those in all schools. The proportion of pupils attaining an A*-C grade was low but the proportion of pupils attaining an A*-G grade was average. Boys performed better than girls. These results were, however, substantially better than those in 2003. The department has implemented successful strategies to raise standards, particularly in GCSE coursework: this was well above average in 2004 and pupils' achievement was very good.
132. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are below average; pupils' achievement is good. Standards on entry in Year 7 are well below average but by Year 9 pupils have made good progress. Most pupils can write structured pieces and can use sources to extract information. Pupils of above average ability can produce longer pieces of writing which deploy their detailed knowledge to good effect and many can evaluate sources for reliability. Pupils of below average ability are beginning to write in structured form. Many pupils have weaknesses of literacy which impede their work, so the knowledge and understanding they show in oral work are often better than the quality of their writing might suggest.
133. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are below average; pupils' achievement is good. By Year 11, most pupils have a reasonably secure knowledge and understanding of the topics they have studied. Pupils of above average ability can produce a good standard of writing and they can use, interpret and evaluate historical sources. Most pupils can write structured answers, use sources effectively and make some evaluation of their reliability. Pupils of below average ability can use sources but not evaluate them; their understanding is often better than their written work suggests. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because work is well matched to their needs and they are offered effective support in class. Very good support from staff combined with determined effort by pupils themselves means that pupils' achievement in GCSE coursework is very good.
134. Teaching and learning are good. There are a number of consistent strengths. Teachers have a good command of their subject and they present their material well; pupils are interested and make a good effort. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives which pupils understand. Teachers manage their classes very well and as a result behaviour is consistently good and pupils' attitudes to the subject and to their teachers are positive, and often very positive.
135. In most lessons, work is well matched to the ability of pupils and the pace of lessons is brisk. In a Year 8 lesson on the Spanish Armada, pupils with special educational needs made very good progress because the resources were closely targeted to their needs and teaching assistants gave very effective support. Occasionally, however, there is a need to match work more closely to different abilities within a class, or for more variation of task to develop a wider range of skills. A satisfactory Year 11 lesson on the Cold War began with a good decision-making exercise which challenged pupils to think for themselves but did not allow sufficient time for discussion. In Years 10 and 11, the skills for success at GCSE are taught very systematically, as in a good Year 10 lesson on the treaty of Versailles. Pupils' learning is sometimes not as good as teaching because many pupils lack self-motivation and confidence. This was seen in a Year 8 lesson which used imaginative methods and role play to teach pupils about mass production in the industrial revolution and to develop their number skills; later in the lesson, however, some of the class were reluctant to write.

136. Assessment is good. Teachers mark work regularly and give good feedback which ensures that pupils understand how well they are doing and how to improve their work; those in Years 10 and 11 are, however, clearer about their targets than pupils in lower years. Pupils use ICT for homework but teachers do not make sufficient use of computers to enhance pupils' learning in class.
137. Leadership and management are good. The head of department provides a good role model to staff and pupils and leads an effective team. There is a clear commitment to raising standards, which is proving successful. Further monitoring would assist in ensuring that the best practice in teaching is seen more consistently across all lessons, particularly in the lower years. The department offers very good support to individual pupils outside lessons. The department makes a significant contribution to pupils' social and moral education but offers relatively few visits to enhance the curriculum.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE religious studies is well organised and enables pupils to achieve well.
- Effective management of non-specialist teaching ensures consistency, although the pitch of the work for more able pupils in Years 7 to 9 is not yet high enough.
- Assessment supports the improvement of GCSE pupils but is less effective for younger pupils.
- Pupils are not helped to improve their spelling and their factual inaccuracies are not always corrected.

Commentary

138. There has been good improvement since the last inspection; all pupils now study a GCSE course and sixth form students attend conferences with religious and ethical dimensions.
139. Standards are below average overall across all years. Standards of work of Year 9 pupils are below average. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory but pupils do not achieve as much as they could as there is insufficient progression. For example, some pupils compared Buddhist teaching with morality in Western society but most work was pitched towards straightforward symbolism or descriptive features of Islam or Sikhism.
140. Some pupils follow a full GCSE in religious studies; others follow an integrated humanities course which incorporates religious education. The 2004 integrated humanities results were below national averages and religious studies full course results were average. The standard of work of pupils following GCSE religious studies was average; the attainment of pupils following the integrated humanities course was high. Achievement is good overall. Pupils work in good detail and many produce higher-level responses, writing fluently about how people might get closer to God and on the ethics of cloning. Pupils taking integrated humanities spoke eloquently about issues such as just wars, abortion and euthanasia. Hypothesis-led coursework investigations are of high quality, relating a range of religious teachings to primary findings.
141. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Religious studies is well taught to ensure that pupils can use their detailed knowledge to meet the higher levels expected in GCSE. Integrated humanities included strong discussions and a moving study of prejudice in Nazi Germany and contemporary Britain. Teachers' assessment comments are helpful for GCSE but there is no strategy for improving spelling of specialist vocabulary or commonly mis-spelled words.

Interactive whiteboards and guided games are well used to stimulate learning but some pupils are not motivated by routine work and texts that are difficult for them to read.

142. Leadership and management are good. GCSE courses are well managed with regular testing and good feedback. Assessment of learning for pupils in Years 7 to 9 is not developed well enough to help pupils improve their responses during the teaching of a unit; factual inaccuracies are sometimes marked as correct. Teaching and pupils' work are monitored but more needs to be done to improve the attainment of more able younger pupils and to improve assessment by making use of national exemplification material to set and moderate standards.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is significant underachievement among boys.
- The quality of work being produced in textiles is above average and pupils achieve very well.
- Ongoing staffing problems pose significant difficulties for faculty management and the development of higher standards.
- Design development work and the use of graphics within designing and making are unsatisfactory.
- Good use is made of ICT in developing pupils' designing and manufacturing.
- Pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are not developed well enough.

Commentary

143. Improvement overall since the last inspection is just satisfactory though this disguises the huge difference between work in textiles and work elsewhere in the department; standards in textiles are above average whilst standards in workshop- and graphics-related examinations are well below average.
144. Pupils enter the school with ability levels in the subject that are well below the national average. Standards are still well below average overall in Year 9 but better in food and textiles technology. Designing skills in Years 7 to 9 are weak overall but better in textiles. In particular, a cohesive approach to the use of graphics and drawing is notably absent. The two-dimensional work seen in design folios is of well below average standard. Practical work in all media is of a better standard in these years but remains below average overall, particularly for boys. Overall, achievement is unsatisfactory; girls achieve well, boys achieve unsatisfactorily.
145. Results at GCSE were well below average overall in 2004 and similar to 2003. The gap between the results achieved by girls and boys is very significant. The trends in examination results have been going down in food technology and graphic products during the past four years. Resistant materials technology results have remained at a low but steady level apart from in 2002 when they doubled to 62 per cent A*-C for one year only. However, results in textiles technology, taken mostly by girls, in the past four years have risen remarkably; excellent progress has been made with 47 percent A*-C passes in 2001 rising to 72 percent in 2004. Standards of work in Year 11 are below

average overall. The huge difference between girls' work and boys' work is still apparent; girls are making good progress overall but boys are under-achieving significantly.

146. The use of ICT to help develop design ideas and to manufacture items through use of computer-controlled machines is helping to raise standards. However, designing is still limited and the use of graphical techniques such as annotated sketches is infrequent. The use of correct technological words and descriptions of processes are too often missing. Written work in pupils' folios is generally poor and a concerted effort to improve pupils' literacy is needed. Opportunities to help improve pupils' numeracy, when calculating dimensions for example, are also frequently absent. Work in textiles does include such opportunities well, and food technology reinforces terminology and quantities during practical work.
147. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Lessons ranged from excellent to unsatisfactory, the best being within textiles technology and food technology. Planning is normally effective and teachers have clear learning objectives and suitable techniques to meet them. However, work is not varied enough to cope with the wide range of pupils' abilities in classes; in some cases the reading level of documents given to pupils is incorrect. There are generally good relationships between pupils and teachers but poor behaviour spoils some lessons. A very good Year 9 food technology lesson made a clear start so all pupils knew what to do, key words were emphasised, a teaching assistant and technician were both well integrated into the lesson to help pupils learn; a plenary concluding session ensured all pupils had gained appropriate knowledge and skills about bread making. An unsatisfactory Year 10 graphics lesson failed because pupils were inadequately prepared for the rigours of an ICT graphics package; they became frustrated and attitudes and behaviour degenerated to unsatisfactory. In contrast, a vocational GCSE engineering lesson in Year 10 was very good because the teacher had prepared very well for the lesson, which continued at a very good pace throughout; pupils acquired or improved basic metal-working skills well. Teaching assistants are used well in supporting pupils on an individual basis as well as in small groups. Technicians are also very diligent and are highly valued by both staff and pupils alike; their support of non-specialist supply teachers is particularly effective.
148. Leadership and management of the faculty are good overall but success is hindered by staffing difficulties. The head of faculty teaches very well, leads by example and has steered the faculty through some difficult times. Strategic planning for the long term is good, as is the day-to-day management that ensures efficient working. Staff work well together. Documentation is satisfactory and record keeping is good. Sensible targets have been set for the future that include curriculum development as well as heightened use of ICT.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

149. The provision in **drama** was not inspected in detail but five lessons were seen across Years 7 to 11. Teaching was never less than good and often very good. Pupils relished their lessons because they were actively involved in their learning; they took responsibility and thoroughly enjoyed stimulating teaching. The teaching of drama not only significantly enriches the curriculum, but also improves standards in other areas of pupils' development because students are confident, thoughtful and committed. This was seen to very good effect in a Year 11 lesson in which a boy participated who was not taking drama; he enjoyed the challenge and the interaction with peers but was often disinterested and likely to cause problems elsewhere. Another boy was enabled to follow a different module of work which did not involve performance but built on his ICT interests.
150. Teachers have very high expectations of performance and behaviour and pupils know they have to be responsible and independent learners. Very strong emphasis on varied activities, personal development and collaborative work enhances pupils' enjoyment

and motivation. Provision is very good in a wide range of extra-curricular drama activities which contribute to the very positive ethos of the school. All years are involved and pupils and students are committed, exuberant and reliable. There are excellent relationships in the department and there is a high degree of mutual respect between learners and teachers. Forty-four pupils took GCSE drama in 2004, which represented a higher proportion than average; results were below the national average at the very highest grades but pupils achieved very well overall.

151. One lesson of **dance** was seen which was excellent; a substantial amount of related evidence was also looked at. The school employs 2.2 (full time equivalent) dance teachers, and has very good accommodation for the subject. Since its beginning three years ago, provision has grown rapidly in both scope and quality, and pupils and students have already been successfully entered for examinations at both GCSE and A-level. Leadership is excellent and very detailed schemes of work and lesson plans provide vibrant and demanding continuity and progression from Year 7 to Year 13. Many pupils, both boys and girls, actively take up extra-curricular opportunities, and perceptions of the subject are very good. It is unclear at present whether the subject stands alone as a performing art form, or whether its work contributes towards the aesthetic element of physical education. This position requires clarification.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is very good for both girls and boys across all year groups as a result of very good teaching, and standards are improving.
- Pupils with special educational needs achieve very well.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive
- Leadership and management are very good.
- There are too few opportunities for pupils to integrate ICT into their art.

Commentary

152. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Attainment in GCSE has improved in recent years and is now close to the national average. Teaching and learning continue to improve and as a result all pupils now exhibit confidence in their learning and expect to achieve well. Printmaking and textiles have been developed to extend the curriculum provision with a beneficial impact on the range and standard of work. ICT is still not sufficiently used to help pupils learn better.
153. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2004 indicate standards were average and work seen during the inspection is of a similar standard; a significant minority of pupils have above average standards of work. Both boys and girls achieve very well, including those with special educational needs, because of the incremental development of their basic art skills, including the language needed to understand and express them.
154. The proportion of GCSE A*-C grades in 2004 was below the national average but comparison of pupils' results with their performance in all subjects shows that, for most pupils taking art and design, it was their best result. The proportion of pupils attaining an A*-G grade was very high.

155. The standard of work seen in Year 11 is average overall but sometimes better. Both boys and girls achieve very well as a result of very good teaching and individualised assessment which enables them to set targets and improve their grades. Pupils build on the skills and knowledge gained during Key Stage 3 to develop their GCSE or GNVQ project work. They are able to synthesise a wide range of two- and three-dimensional processes, including painting, printmaking and ceramics, with sensitivity and skill. In the Year 11 GNVQ group, pupils with special educational needs have folders full of rigorous well-realised ideas and are making excellent progress.
156. Teaching and learning are very good in all years. Supportive mentoring, assured classroom management and secure subject knowledge are underpinned by a meticulously planned scheme of work which provides progression from year to year, across the key stage and from one key stage to the next. Particularly effective are assessment and target setting, which are embedded in each pupil's thinking about their work as they are able to identify what is required to progress to a higher grade or level. Learning basic skills and processes is linked to personal and expressive frames of reference, as in the Year 7 work based on Kandinsky's painting, which is developed into inventive card sculptures. When pupils take on very challenging tasks, as in the three-dimensional figure project in Year 9, they make sophisticated personal explorations of space and structure which produce higher than expected attainment.
157. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have very good study habits developed when they were younger. In Year 10 pupils use sets of original designs to explore a range of rigorously applied colour options in preparation for their final piece and in Year 11 pupils are working with imagination and skill on complex patterned compositions. Subtle colour work and some exquisite ceramics are characteristic of the art area and in displays around the college. Pupils use sketchbooks very well to record and collect visual ideas and observations.
158. Leadership and management are very good. The head of art and design has a clear vision for the subject and has created an ethos in which every individual matters. The cohesive and well-balanced team has a strong focus on achievement. Resources are good and well managed. Each teacher is encouraged to work to his or her particular strength in a highly motivated team. A technician works closely with pupils and informal mentoring by the two artists in residence and sixth form students create a strongly supportive community in the art area. At present ICT is accessible to most pupils but it has not been embedded in the curriculum as a significant dimension in art and design. Outstanding work by individual pupils, as in the 'Cats' animation piece by a GNVQ pupil, highlights the unrealised potential of digital media in art.
159. Art makes a significant contribution to the spiritual and cultural development of pupils, providing opportunities for reflection, the exploration of the senses and a wide range of stimuli from different times and places.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good leadership and an excellent specialist teaching team are providing better opportunities to promote pupils' achievement and good improvement since the previous inspection.
- While there is a better than average range of courses for pupils to continue music in Years 10 and 11, pupils' attainment is restricted by limited performing skills and understanding of musical processes.

- Specialist performing arts status has had a positive impact on the development of music both within the college and in community and other initiatives.

Commentary

160. Overall improvement since the previous inspection is good. The college has met the requirements of the key issue of the previous inspection report to improve provision of and pupils' competency in ICT through music. ICT resources are now good, with sufficient computer stations and laptops for pupils in all years to have developed average skills in notation and composition programs and in research in a relatively short time. Music is developing positive strategies to improve pupils' generally well below average skills in the use of English, although written work remains at a low standard. Very good new leadership, an excellent team of specialist teachers, and new schemes of work, learning styles and enrichment activities are beginning to improve pupils' attainment. There are wider than average opportunities for pupils in Years 10 and 11 to continue music, both in the discrete GCSE music course and within GCSE expressive arts and BTEC performance arts.
161. Pupils enter the school with well below average standards in music and little or no previous learning. By Year 9, standards are below average and, although pupils are now gaining better practical skills, their knowledge and understanding of how music works are generally weak. Nevertheless their achievement is good. Standards are moving closer to average in Years 10 and 11, and while Year 10 pupils have the potential to reach average GCSE standards, Year 11 is overall much weaker. Low levels of performance aggravate pupils' lack of learning skills, contexts and understanding of musical processes. Too few pupils learn instruments and can play at a basic standard. As a result, achievement is only satisfactory by Year 11. GCSE results in 2004 were well below average in relation to A*-C grades, but closer to the average for A*-G grades. Results in previous years were slightly better, but still below average.
162. Teaching and learning are good and sometimes very good, both overall and in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11. Pupils benefit from the exceptionally wide range of specialisms, performing ability and professional experience that the relatively young, dynamic and imaginative teaching team provides. Very good lesson planning and reinforcement of learning through questioning, encouragement and support promote positive learning for pupils of all attainment levels. Carefully adapted tasks and expert teaching assistants support pupils with special educational needs very well. However, more capable pupils are not always sufficiently encouraged to reach for the most challenging options, and for all pupils keyboard technique is not as well developed as it could be. Overall attainment is lower than it could be because pupils are not developing sufficient knowledge and understanding of musical systems to promote greater technical fluency in performing and composing and inform better analytical listening.
163. The leadership of the new head of department is very good. In a short time she has grasped the priorities for development and her ambitious initial plans are beginning to have a positive impact. Management is good and is committed to constant monitoring and review for improvement. Pupils have many very good opportunities to extend their skills and experience in music in a very wide range of vocal and instrumental ensembles. The current lack of instrumentalists has led to the development of high standards in vocal and choral music. During the inspection the full range of groups

performed in a public concert which was enthusiastically supported by a capacity audience. This also demonstrated the impact of the college's specialist performing arts status on musical development, which is extended through collaborations with drama and dance in musical theatre productions and in innovative and outreach initiatives with feeder primary schools and the local community. Specialist status has also provided outstanding new accommodation and good resources.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision for physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Consistently good teaching leads to good learning for pupils of all ages.
- Well-motivated pupils make good progress in lessons.
- Excellent accommodation gives every pupil the opportunity to learn well.
- Pupils get fewer opportunities to experience gymnastic and dance activities than is the case in most schools.
- There is no clear method for measuring the attainment of pupils when they enter the school.

Commentary

164. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Strong aspects have been maintained, and areas noted for improvement have largely been addressed. The quality of teaching is more consistent, lessons are now well planned, and work set meets the needs of all pupils well.
165. GCSE results in 2004 were well below the national average. This was predicted. Pupils who took the examination did better than they did in the other subjects they sat.
166. When pupils enter the school in Year 7, observations show that their level of attainment is decidedly below the national expectation. By the end of Year 9, teacher assessments show that the attainment of pupils is broadly average. By Year 11, the overall attainment of pupils is average. This represents good achievement for all pupils over their 5 years at the school.
167. By Year 9, when standards are broadly average, pupils are able to perform competently and with confidence in a wide range of games. They know the rules and regulations of several sports. They understand the principles of team play, and they can operate effectively in individual competition. The skills and knowledge of gymnastics of most pupils are underdeveloped, and at a lower level than average. Recently introduced dance has strengthened the curriculum and is growing in popularity. Pupils have a good understanding of health related fitness and they know how, and why, to warm up before exercise. Lead learners (identified pupils with high levels of ability) in all years routinely lead warm up sessions before activities.
168. By Year 11, standards are average, as pupils build on the well-laid foundations of earlier years. Progress and learning in a wide range of games activities are always at least good. The very large majority of pupils effectively apply their activity-specific knowledge, their performance skills and their understanding of rules and tactics, in both conditioned and full game situations. They are effective participants in soccer,

hockey, volleyball, and badminton. The aesthetic dimension of pupils' learning is not as well defined. In GCSE lessons, pupils are well motivated and work hard to develop their knowledge of anatomy and physiology and their practical games skills.

169. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good. Three very good lessons were seen. All teachers have secure professional knowledge, and this gives pupils confidence. Class management is never less than good, giving all pupils the opportunity to engage successfully in lessons and thus make good progress. All lessons are well planned, and the use of shared learning objectives, allied to searching questions to test and to secure pupils' understanding and knowledge, ensures that pupils consistently learn well. Teachers have high expectations that pupils will work hard and behave correctly, and they do. The best lessons move forward quickly, and use good demonstrations and clear instructions to set progressive challenges. Teaching methods are varied, and teaching assistants are well deployed to meet the individual needs of all pupils.
170. Pupils arrive promptly and change very quickly for lessons. They have a positive attitude to the subject. They pay close attention to guidance, and work co-operatively with energy and enthusiasm. They are trustworthy and can work effectively when not under direct supervision. They make good use of opportunities to analyse and evaluate their own and others' performances against specific criteria. Relationships and behaviour in lessons are very good, and contribute strongly to safe working and good overall progress. Pupils with special educational needs progress at a similar rate to their peers. More competent pupils are provided with a range of extension work to stretch their natural abilities. There are no discernable differences in the attitudes to learning of different groups of pupils. Pupils with different types of physical disability, including cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, ataxia, and renal failure have good access to physical education facilities. In an excellent sample session, under the guidance of a physical education teaching assistant with an FA coaching award, pupils worked very hard at competitive conditioned wheelchair soccer. The fully inclusive nature of the activity created a wonderful atmosphere in which pupils, with no little physical commitment and effort, were able to experience the passion and tension of an intense, team based activity.
171. Leadership and management are good. The department is effectively led and well managed. The recently created teaching team has a good blend of youth, experience, and specialist abilities. It has a vision of the standards it wishes to achieve, and is learning how to reach these standards. End-of-module assessment and reporting arrangements provide increasingly accurate information on how well pupils are progressing, though there is no robust way of measuring the general standards pupils have when they enter the school. Pupils become more aware of the levels at which they are working as they progress from year to year. Regular monitoring of learning keeps standards in the classrooms high. The extensive range of curricular and extra-curricular activities offers many opportunities for pupils to refine and develop their physical performances. Many pupils compete successfully in teams at district and area level, some reaching regional standard.
172. Accommodation is excellent. The department is well funded and the quality and amount of equipment for use in lessons are good.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

173. Work in this area was sampled during the inspection of the sixth form. In Years 10 and 11, the provision for this range of subjects is very good. The college offers a wide range of courses that provide suitable learning challenges in response to pupils' differing learning needs. Most of these courses are college based and lead to vocational GCSEs in health and social care, art and design, engineering, information technology, performing arts and leisure and tourism. Some students, however, study for pre-entry national vocational courses in partner institutions. Courses are well structured, planned and taught so that pupils learn and achieve well. Vocational education is closely integrated with work-related learning and careers advice.
174. One Year 11 lesson in **health and social care** was sampled where pupils were observed working on examination questions. Teaching and learning were very good because of the level of interaction which took place and the knowledge and understanding which pupils displayed. Standards were average and this represents very good achievement for these pupils. This vocational GCSE was introduced two years ago. Results in 2004 were below average for the proportion of pupils achieving grades in the A*-C range but above average for those achieving grades A*-G. A few pupils' results were adversely affected by their illness in the final year.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils are achieving well because they have good opportunities to develop citizenship within the curriculum and in the many very good activities offered by the school.
- Pupils in Years 10 and 11 can gain a GCSE qualification in citizenship within the integrated humanities course.
- Good opportunities are lost to extend pupils' citizenship experience through other subjects because pupils are not made aware of them.

Commentary

175. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Citizenship is established well within the curriculum and pupils have many very good opportunities to develop active citizenship through the pastoral system, extra-curricular activities, in the programme promoted by the college's specialist status in performing arts, and within its very good local, national and international initiatives. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 learn citizenship in dedicated lessons, which also cover the personal social and health education programme, as well as through other subjects, such as English, geography, history, religious education, music, and particularly in drama. Sometimes pupils are not made sufficiently aware that they are studying citizenship in these lessons and opportunities to raise their awareness are lost. In Years 10 and 11, citizenship is taught within the integrated humanities course, which means that pupils can gain a GCSE qualification in citizenship skills, knowledge and understanding. There are occasional whole-school or specific year focus days on citizenship and health topics.
176. Standards of attainment by Year 9 are below the national average. Pupils are gaining good awareness of important issues, but their generally poor speaking and reasoning skills hinder the development of discussion and evaluation. Nevertheless, their achievement is good because they entered the school with well below average standards in basic skills and no prior experience of citizenship. Attainment is average in Years 10 and 11 and pupils are better at expressing and justifying their own opinions and appreciating those of others, discussing,

negotiating and resolving opposing viewpoints. Their written work shows comparable development. Their achievement is good and this is commendable considering that they did not have their full entitlement to develop citizenship through Years 7 to 9.

177. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. There is good and sometimes very good teaching in Years 10 and 11 where specialist teachers with full command of their subjects provide a secure and stimulating environment for pupils to share and evaluate a number of different views of sometimes controversial or difficult issues. Teachers' skilful questioning develops pupils' learning skills by encouraging them to think more deeply about issues and become more analytical in justifying opinions. Satisfactory teaching in Years 7 to 9 is spread across a number of non-specialist teachers, although it is intended eventually to produce a specialist dedicated team. There is some uncertainty amongst both pupils and teachers about the standard of work that is expected from pupils of different ages. Neither the overall scheme of work nor lesson plans are sufficiently detailed to show how pupils build on their previous experiences in the subject, or to suggest how tasks and topics might be adapted to suit pupils of different capabilities.
178. Assessment is good and supports pupils' progress well in Years 10 and 11. In Years 7 to 9 pupils are encouraged to evaluate their own progress, but the current lack of levels of attainment in citizenship means that they cannot correlate accurately their progress against standards in other National Curriculum subjects. In all years, pupils have good opportunities to use ICT for research and to produce their own work and presentations. Formal seating arrangements are sometimes unhelpful in assisting pupils' discussion and debate.
179. Good leadership and management have ensured that citizenship is now firmly embedded and focused in the college. The co-ordinator is taking advantage of good citizenship networking opportunities, very good community links and ongoing initiatives to raise pupils' awareness of good citizenship. Regular reviews of provision and monitoring of teaching and learning promote changes and development. There is a good subject development plan which recognises that pupils' experience of citizenship must respond to ever-changing social, political, educational and environmental issues.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 9 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2004.

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and Design	26	96.1	78.3	30.1	21.6	35.7	28.5
Biology	30	50.0	63.5	0.0	10.4	11.3	19.8
Chemistry	10	30.0	70.3	0.0	13.2	8.0	23.0
Communication Studies	4	100.0	87.2	0.0	24.9	35.0	32.8
Dance	1	100.0	82.0	0.0	21.9	30.0	29.7
Drama	4	100.0	86.6	0.0	19.8	30.0	30.9
English Literature	26	88.4	86.2	23.1	17.4	29.2	29.7
Design and Technology	5	90.0	72.6	60.0	13.9	40.0	24.3
General Studies	8	87.5	73.6	12.5	16.9	27.5	25.5
Information Technology	9	44.4	66.6	0.0	8.8	12.2	20.6
Mathematics	8	87.5	59.9	12.5	14.1	27.5	20.5
Other social studies	20	60.0	67.8	5.0	15.1	18.0	23.2
Physics	24	62.5	66.4	4.2	14.8	16.6	22.4
Sociology	1	100.0	72.1	0.0	19.6	30.0	25.9
Spanish	2	50.0	77.1	0.0	17.0	15.0	26.5
Total	178	47.9	73.3	0.7	16.6	22.3	25.3

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and Design	23	90.0	98.3	34.8	50.2	73.9	87.1
Biology	8	87.5	96.6	0.0	40.0	57.5	79.3
Chemistry	6	100.0	97.7	16.7	50.0	66.6	85.7
Communication Studies	4	100.0	99.2	25.0	40.4	80.0	83.5
Dance	2	100.0	98.9	0.0	42.6	40.0	84.3
Drama	2	100.0	99.6	0.0	42.8	70.0	85.1
English Literature	13	100.0	99.4	15.4	44.9	56.9	85.5
Design and Technology	5	80.0	97.8	0.0	35.0	44.0	77.9
General Studies	1	0.0	94.9	0.0	30.5	0.0	72.9
Geography	2	50.0	98.8	0.0	46.4	30.0	85.2
History	10	100.0	99.0	10.0	45.6	64.0	85.1
Information Technology	5	100.0	96.3	0.0	25.7	48.0	71.1
Mathematics	3	100.0	96.8	33.3	56.6	80.0	89.5
Other social studies	6	66.7	97.4	0.0	42.5	46.7	81.6
Physics	3	66.7	96.7	0.0	45.3	40.0	82.6
Total	94	89.4	97.8	12.8	42.9	43.8	82.5
VCE Health and Social Care	7	100.0	93.5	0.0	24.9	57.1	70.0
Information Technology VQ	10	100.0	88.3	0.0	26.9	44.0	67.8
Total	17	95.0	91.1	0.0	25.7	49.4	68.8

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English literature

Provision in English literature is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good.
- Teachers are committed to improving achievement.
- Planning and preparation are effective.
- Encouragement and individual support given to students is very good.
- Literacy and key skills are underdeveloped and present a barrier to higher levels of achievement.
- Irregular attendance by some students results in a lack of continuity.
- Students' capacity to work independently is underdeveloped.

Commentary

180. Improvement since the previous inspection is good.
181. A-level results in 2004 were below average whereas AS results were average overall. Standards of work seen during the inspection are below average overall; a minority of students produce work at least in line with and sometimes above average. Students' achievement is satisfactory; results are in line with expectations based on students' prior attainment.
182. Students embarking on AS and A-level courses usually have a grade C or above in GCSE English literature; the majority have grade C but a few have grades B–A*. However, students' generally weak literacy skills and knowledge of language impede their progress. In addition, students' reliance on teachers to provide research resources constrains their ability to work independently, and irregular attendance, by a minority of students, affects the continuity of their studies.
183. Teaching is good. Teachers prepare and plan their lessons very well and provide students with appropriate resources to enhance their studies. The marking and assessment of coursework are thorough. Assessment is good. Teachers identify clearly assessment objectives and how well students have succeeded in meeting them. They give suitable advice and guidance on how students can improve the quality of their work and also comment on the language and style used in responding to the different aspects of the syllabus. Performance is carefully monitored and information used to review teaching.
184. Learning is satisfactory. Students are too reliant on teachers. They do not use research skills effectively and show reluctance to work independently. Teachers in Years 12 and 13 are developing strategies to ensure that students fully understand the examination criteria and develop their independent studies more effectively. Students' standards of literacy are below those expected of students at this level and this is also affecting their ability to respond at a more appropriate level to the texts being studied. Students do not have a great awareness of the context of some of the texts studied and teachers include extra research to improve students' knowledge and understanding of the historical and cultural contexts in which texts were first published.
185. Leadership is good. The head of department, who has been in post since October 2003, is a good role model and has developed an effective team of sixth form teachers who are fully committed to helping students achieve at a higher level. The selection of students who opt to do English literature courses does not involve English staff until students have chosen the course; this has resulted in a number of students who have attainment well below that generally expected for this course. Teachers have catered well for these students and provide good support in order for them to access the work. Plans to enter higher attaining pupils in Year 11 for AS level are being considered at present.
186. Management is satisfactory. There is now better awareness of the varied needs of students, and strategies to develop their independence are under way. Study and literacy skills are also being developed. Monitoring of students' progress and taking action are good. Demands of the mainstream school have been a priority and the work at present undertaken in Key Stage 4 English will begin to positively impact on post-16 provision in the future.
187. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory; although there is no specific base for sixth form students, the facilities available to them meet their present needs. Students have access to ICT and teachers are building a bank of resources for research purposes. The contribution made to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students through the texts selected for study is satisfactory. Discussion in lessons is, however, constrained at times by the students' lack of general knowledge of the world and the historical context in which texts have been written.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

188. Students following academic courses have varied literacy skills, whatever their GCSE background, and they are too low in some courses including English literature, ICT, and health

and social care. Students following history currently develop their literacy skills well. Provision to improve the literacy skills of pupils following vocational courses is very good overall.

MATHEMATICS

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Relationships between the teacher and the students are very good.
- There is a variety of courses to suit all levels of ability.
- Opportunities for students to direct their own learning through formal self-assessment procedures are very effective.
- The numbers of students completing the A-level course are relatively low.

Commentary

189. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Issues raised at the time of the last inspection have been addressed, though student numbers completing the A-level mathematics course remain stubbornly low.
190. In 2004, standards in the GCE mathematics AS level examination were above the national average. Students' achievement compared to their performance at GCSE is good. The current standards of work of Year 12 students are broadly average and achievement is satisfactory. Students are well into the new courses, making good use of previously taught skills; for example, students applied their knowledge of the rules of indices very well when deriving the logarithmic rules from first principles.
191. The number of students entered for the GCE mathematics A-level examination was below the minimum for a comparison of performance to be made against national figures. All students who were entered for the examination achieved a pass grade or better. The standards of work of Year 13 students are broadly average and their achievement is satisfactory. Student files contain evidence of much work completed and provide a good record for review and revision. Students recall knowledge well and apply it in lessons and their written work; for example, hypothesis testing using the binomial distribution based on work involving discrete random variables.
192. The quality of teaching and learning is overall very good. Teachers use their good knowledge of the subject effectively and are aware of course requirements. Lessons are planned well and students have the opportunity to formally assess their own performance and identify areas for improvement throughout the programmes of study. There is a good balance in lessons between explanation, demonstration, discussion, application, problem solving, investigation and review. Teachers have high expectations of students and work is intellectually challenging. Teaching methods build on students' previous learning and teachers check students' understanding before proceeding further, often relating work to individual experiences. Relationships between teachers and students and between students themselves are very good. As a result, students work hard, sometimes contributing as much in lessons as the teacher. However, opportunities for students to direct their own learning through pre-reading and research are not strongly enforced. Methods could be more innovative at times to encourage student-to-student interaction to occur more often. Homework is set regularly and collaborative marking is up to date.
193. Leadership and management of the department are very good. Curriculum development is good. There is a range of appropriate courses to meet the needs of all students. The team of subject specialists are committed and approachable and prepared to give up their time outside lessons to support students, which is appreciated by them. Analysis of examination results is

thorough and there is a clear focus on improving standards. On-going assessment procedures are innovative. The students are aware of their target grades and what to do to improve. The resources that are available are used well, though the development of ICT has not kept pace with nationally developing trends for the teaching of the subject and for the improvement in students' skills. Accommodation is very good.

Mathematics across the curriculum

194. Students' standards in mathematics on entry to the sixth form are overall below average. As a result, all Year 12 students studying academic courses include the study of key skills 'application of number' at an appropriate level. Key skills is taught as an integral part of every mathematics course, including A-level mathematics and GCSE 'resit' mathematics, and students are examined and accredited to support their education and training after school. Other departments support a range of numerical experiences. However, the breadth of links between departments that exist within schemes of work and programmes of study, with respect to the application of number, is not being identified sufficiently. All vocational courses offered to students contain work-related elements of the application of number. Students are encouraged to demonstrate and extend their key skills up to the highest level and the standard of students' work is measured against the key skills application of number criteria. Students' work is recorded in their own files, which is verified by the course providers. All students are encouraged to gain the additional accreditation in application of number as preparation for the world of work.

SCIENCE

Physics and chemistry were sampled. Examination results in both are below national averages but standards of work in lessons were average and students' overall achievement good. The Year 12 **physics** lesson seen was good and the Year 13 **chemistry** lesson excellent; the difference owed much to the different number of students, 12 in physics, 3 in chemistry; small numbers enabled the lesson to be tutorially based so individuals learnt faster and achieved more.

Biology

Provision in biology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Enthusiastic and expert teachers are committed to helping students to achieve the best results possible.
- Assessment is regular and keeps students well informed.
- Very good relationships between staff and students lead to informal but intensive lessons.
- The student body is interested and well motivated.

Commentary

195. Biology is historically the most popular science discipline. Results are usually in the A-E range for all candidates but disappointing results in 2004 reflect staffing difficulties which have now been resolved.

196. Standards of current work are below average overall. In the work seen and heard, the level of response and discussion was often above that expected based on prior attainment at GCSE; students are achieving well. The inhibiting factor is usually students' lack of confidence and the ability to learn independently because of earlier 'spoon-feeding'. In addition, many students in their final year necessarily spend long hours in paid employment after school, and some have no suitable place at home for intensive revision. Biology files are detailed, comprehensive, well presented and often show that students have been reading and researching well beyond the examination syllabus. Practical work is carefully and competently done, with students helping each other over minor difficulties and sharing data and ideas willingly. Discussion and argument are lively and well mannered, and command of scientific vocabulary grows during the course. By Year 13, students are using technical terminology correctly and confidently, and these skills are deliberately encouraged and developed to raise the quality of written answers. The recent results of the retaken AS examination are an improvement on the 2004 results and have raised students' morale and determination for the forthcoming A-level examinations.
197. The standards of teaching and of the resulting learning are both very good overall and some lessons seen were excellent. Students benefit from the variety of teaching styles that three different teachers employ and in particular from the tutorial nature of lessons when group sizes are small. In these, teaching is to a greater depth, at a faster pace and covers more ground. Importantly, individual support is also possible to an extent not possible with larger groups. Relationships are very good and lessons are very well-mannered and informal with question and answer flowing in both directions and free discussion and scientific argument. These are strengths of the department and lead to very good learning and a wider experience than normal. Students are motivated by their teachers' expertise and commitment and they respond well to being treated as responsible young adults. Imaginative use of data projectors, as well as importing a range of resources such as video clips and animations, enlivens lessons and adds to interest in a way that is not possible with textbooks.
198. The quality of leadership and management is obscured by the absence of the head of biology, but under the present temporary arrangements, both are good. The team is a strong one and the sense of direction and purpose is clear. Facilities and resources are good and laboratories provide ample space for experimental work. The quality of teaching has risen since the previous inspection, but there is insufficient evidence to judge other aspects of improvement.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well.
- The quality of teaching is good.
- The head of faculty provides good leadership.
- Teachers provide students with a strong, thought-provoking curriculum.

Commentary

199. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Students' work at the time of inspection in Year 12 and Year 13 indicate that standards are improving.
200. GCE A-Level results and the AVCE award in 2004 were well below average. No students achieved the highest grades but most students obtained a pass grade. Students' achievement in these examinations was satisfactory; it was not better than that because of poor attitudes, weak time management and irregular attendance by a minority. Results at AS level have been variable in recent years although the number of candidates entered has been too small to use for analysis. The number of candidates opting for AS-level IT and the AVCE course in IT is now healthier, averaging about 12 students in each class.
201. Standards in Year 12 and Year 13 are average. Students achieve well, particularly in terms of website page design and database design. Their work is thoughtful and analytical. Year 13 students have compiled good quality reports about the relational databases they have designed and implemented. These working databases contain relationship tables, and a range of forms and fields. Students understand technical terms such as normalisation and data dictionary but sometimes find difficulty in explaining them because their literacy skills are limited. Students have a good idea about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work because their teachers give them very informed feedback.
202. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers are knowledgeable and skilful and inspire students to achieve their potential. When teaching is particularly effective, such as in a Year 13 lesson on database design, it is characterised by good preparation of relevant resources, very good planning, very good subject knowledge, determined learning, and thorough, detailed assessment of students' work. When teaching is less effective, teachers do not check as they go how successfully students have understood the concepts being studied.
203. The department is well led and the subject is developing well. Teachers provide students with a thought-provoking curriculum. Good progress has been achieved in recent years in adding an AS-level course and an AVCE course in IT. Plans are in place to broaden provision further with the piloting of another vocationally-oriented course. Part-time students are also able to take a short course in IT based upon the requirements of the GNVQ course. The department makes a very good contribution to the college's ethos of inclusion for all students, including those with profound special educational needs, and a good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

204. Provision for and use of ICT are similar to those seen in the main school. Students have very good access to computers and use them appropriately when necessary. Teachers use ICT aids less consistently; there is good use in biology, but insufficient use in mathematics.

HUMANITIES

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching challenges students and leads to very good achievement.
- Strategies to raise standards are proving successful.
- Very good assessment ensures that students feel confident and understand how to improve their work.
- Student attitudes to the subject are very positive.

Commentary

205. Improvement since the last inspection is very good. At that time, history was not inspected in detail. Recent examination results at AS level and students' work at the time of inspection both indicate that standards are rising.

206. GCE A-level results in 2004 were well below average. The proportion of students achieving the highest grades was very low, but every student obtained a pass grade. Students' achievement in these examinations was satisfactory; it was not better than satisfactory because of poor attitudes and attendance by a small number of those entered. Results at AS level in 2004 were much better. Compared to 2003, results represent a significant improvement: A-level results were then very low and the trend is therefore upwards.

207. Standards in Years 12 and 13 are average; students' achievement is very good. Standards are significantly higher than recent A-level examinations suggest. Current students' prior learning and attainment are higher; they show very positive attitudes and work hard; teaching strategies to raise standards are proving successful. Students make particularly good progress in their analytical writing, the most crucial skill for success at this level. Students learn quickly how to organise and present their material in a systematic answer to a question; they rarely resort to narrative or descriptive writing, even quite early in the course. This very good progress is a direct result of very systematic teaching. Some students have weaknesses in literacy of varying severity and these can hinder their clarity of expression. The most able students, however, can write to a very high standard. Most students understand and can make use of historical interpretations effectively to support their answers. Students' knowledge and understanding are sound, though some show occasional confusion about details or in understanding particular issues. Standards in the current Year 12 are higher than in the current Year 13. There is no consistent difference in the achievement of male and female students.

208. Teaching and learning are both very good. Lessons are very well planned with clear objectives and a systematic focus on the skills of analysis. In a good Year 13 lesson on Chamberlain and the policy of appeasement, students were challenged to develop their essay planning skills and they made good progress. Teachers challenge students to think for themselves and to develop a wide range of personal skills, including those of research, organisation, making presentations and engaging in debate. These represent very good preparation for higher education. In a very good Year 12 lesson, students debated how far enclosure was the principal cause of rural distress in England, showing good knowledge and understanding of the main issues and very good progress in analysis. Occasionally, however, teachers do not ensure that every student contributes actively to discussions. A few opportunities are missed to ask questions testing higher order thinking, as in an otherwise very good Year 12 lesson on the failure of the Weimar Republic.

209. Students' work is assessed very regularly and very thoroughly; they receive very detailed feedback and very good individual support. As a result, they have a very clear understanding of the progress they are making, of their targets and of how they can improve their work. Students feel confident and well prepared.
210. Leadership and management in the sixth form are very good. There is a determined focus on raising standards. The head of department leads a very effective team and students' progress is monitored very carefully. Students' attitudes to the subject and to their teachers are very positive; retention rates are good; relationships are very good. Students have good access to book and ICT resources to support their independent study.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Students working on the Art and Design (Textiles) courses are considered to be within the design and technology faculty.

Textiles

Provision in textiles is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of designing and making in textiles is high.
- The standard of teaching in textiles is excellent.
- Facilities for working in textiles need updating and improvement.
- ICT is not used enough to both design and manufacture artefacts.

Commentary

211. Results at AS level in 2004 were very high, whereas results at A-level were well below average. Students mainly come from Year 11 in the college but a few come from other schools. Attainment on entry is very varied, particularly in design and technology skills, but all make surprisingly good progress.
212. The creativity displayed by students' work is wide and promoted through very stimulating teaching. Practical work in fashion design collects the highest honours. The very high quality fashion shows displayed in local venues exhibit a very fresh approach to designing and making that captures people's imagination with the use of alternative materials and thoughtful presentations. Standards of work are well above average overall.
213. Teaching is excellent overall. Students are very enthusiastic about the courses and spoke highly of the teaching they received. Students learn effectively, principally through a mixture of practical project work and individual tuition on relevant aspects; very good mutual interaction between students leads to the generation of alternative ideas and variations in approach. Students generally show independence in their work and are highly motivated. Students are all known very well by teachers and are very effectively challenged to improve their work; assessment systems are very good. The support of the two artists in residence is excellent and they offer stimulating new approaches to the students.
214. Leadership and management are very good. There is a clear vision for future development as well as realistic reflection on the successes and failures of the past. The move from a design and technology focused textiles course to one that comes from art and design is a beneficial move resulting in much higher success for students.

215. Group sizes are very high, mid thirties in some cases, but the educational climate is excellent. Current facilities are stretched to their limits with students working on every piece of floor space. Neither is there sufficient access to ICT resources. Better facilities and accommodation are required in order to do the subject full justice.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good overall, and often excellent.
- Students have very good learning habits and attitudes.
- Achievement is very good.
- The curriculum is continually developing to meet the needs of students.
- ICT is not regularly used by all students to support their work in art.

Commentary

216. Improvement since the last inspection is very good. Standards of attainment have significantly improved and achievement is now very good. The use of ICT, however, remains an area for development.

217. In 2004, A-level results were in line with national averages both overall and at the higher A-B grades. AS-level passes were above average, with one third more gaining A-B grades than was the case nationally. Standards of work seen are above average overall, with most A-level students working at a C or D grade. AS students are working at above average standards and work in textiles and photography is taking standards even higher.

218. Both male and female students achieve very well at A level. Many students enter the course with relatively modest prior attainment but go on to achieve above average results. In a significant number of cases, as with most of the photography students, this is achieved in a single year. Students work with maturity, vigour and determination. They are absorbed in their work and their coursework is invariably taken to a successful conclusion.

219. Teaching is very good and there is evidence of regularly outstanding teaching. Learning, which is very good, is highly personalised and this results in both a maturity and depth of work for every student. This is epitomised by the 'sea boxes' produced as part of a themed project for A/AS students. They are, in effect, three-dimensional sketchbooks packed with a mixture of print/textiles/collage and a host of other visual studies and experimental pieces. The well-structured programme of projects includes encouragement for students to develop tangential ideas from central themes. Assessment is effective, formative and accurate. Students know where they are, where they are going and how to get there. Many students find the transition from Year 11 challenging but the teaching on the AS programmes is providing a very effective framework for building confidence and skills.

220. The sixth form curriculum has been developed with intelligence and flair. It meets the needs of a wide range of students, including those for whom art is additional to a range of other subjects. Resources are generally good and the textiles room has become a highly stimulating creative environment.

221. The subject leader has created a highly effective and cohesive team with very good subject knowledge at this level. The introduction of the photography course has created an opportunity for the accelerated development of digital media at an advanced level. Some individuals use ICT very well but it is not fully embedded as a major medium of learning, process and expression in art.
222. Members of the AS/A-level groups frequently act as mentors for younger learners, called 'lead learners' in this school.

BUSINESS

Students are able to follow around 26 vocational courses in the sixth form, many through attendance at satellite centres and other providers. Inspection reviewed general provision of these courses and visits to external centres were made. Vocational provision at Lipson is described as an exemplar of good practice in the government's 14-19 Green Paper (vocational curriculum).

A Year 12 **GNVQ business lesson** was seen. Teaching was good and students achieved well but half the large class were absent which appears typical for a Thursday afternoon. Work placements are used effectively in this course to ensure students learn about modern business practice.

Vocational education

Provision for vocational education is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Dynamic leadership and management are having a positive effect on outcomes.
- An extensive range of vocational courses meets students' diverse needs very well.
- Students benefit from the excellent partnerships which exist with a host of external educational providers.
- Students achieve very well and have positive views of the provision.
- The college is successful in retaining traditionally disengaged students in education.

Commentary

223. Improvement since the previous inspection, when the provision was judged satisfactory, is very good. The range of courses now offered is extensive and includes college based traditional courses like A-levels and GCSEs together with a whole raft of other off-site courses leading to nationally recognised certification. These are made possible by the excellent partnership links which exist with other institutions. Individual programmes of study are devised which take account of students' diverse needs and career aspirations. This is done in conjunction with advice from career professionals and with parental involvement. This is effective and the college is very successful in retaining students who would normally leave education at sixteen. This is because students say they enjoy their courses and recognise the value of gaining additional qualifications, training and workplace experience. For the few who do leave it is generally to go into employment or on to further education or training. Students benefit from work placements and training in literacy and numeracy built into the courses.

224. Results were well above those seen nationally in 2003 and 2004 for the percentage of students achieving NVQ and sports certificated passes. GCSE results are reported separately in subject areas.
225. In the work sampled, standards are well above average in NVQ and sports courses. They are above average in art/textiles. Standards are below average in health and social care and GNVQ business studies, where absence is a contributory factor to lower achievement. Overall, students achieve very well based on very low prior attainment on entry to the sixth form.
226. Teaching and learning are very good and enable students of very low prior attainment to gain nationally recognised qualifications. The personal development of many students is greatly enhanced by their sixth form experience making them potentially more employable. Teachers are subject specialists who build excellent classroom relationships with students so that they are motivated and supported in their learning. Systems are well established to induct students onto courses, monitor their progress and address any problems which arise.
227. Leadership and management of vocational education are outstanding. Students achieve very highly because of the excellent way in which the vocational area is planned, organised with a network of providers and taught. The college has received several awards in recognition of its good practice.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Provision in health and social care AVCE double award is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most students achieve higher examination grades than predicted.
- Classroom relationships are very good and have a positive effect on learning.
- Students develop good independent learning skills and most can work to deadlines.
- Good use is made of community placements to increase subject knowledge and understanding.
- Lower ability students take insufficient account of assessment criteria when working.
- The work of a few students is held back by weak skills in literacy and research.

Commentary

228. Health and social care is offered as a twelve unit double award vocational A-level. A few students choose to take six units for a single award when this is more appropriate. Numbers on courses are usually small and very few boys choose this option. This subject was not reported separately in the last inspection but there has been good improvement since then in the number of students opting to take the course, and in standards. In 2003 results were average when compared with all schools nationally. Results in 2004 for the seven students concerned, too few to make national comparisons, show all pupils achieving a grade in the range A-E but no A/B grades. Most of these students achieved grades one grade higher than results at GCSE would indicate; they achieved well.
229. Students start the course with standards that are well below average. In the work seen, standards are below average overall but this represents good achievement. Standards

are higher in Year 12 than in Year 13, which is a very small group. A few students do not do as well as they might because they do not have full attendance. Students are able to work independently and collaboratively. The majority can meet deadlines for completion of work. They make worthwhile contributions to class discussions. Good use is made of community placements to develop subject knowledge and understanding. ICT is used appropriately and students were observed using computers to help plan a health education promotion. Lower ability students struggle to include depth and focus in a unit of work on environmental issues, owing to their weak skills in research and literacy. Neither do they take sufficient account of assessment criteria whilst working. The majority of students do not understand difficult aspects of the subject like legislation, policy and how organisations are structured.

230. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers have good subject knowledge which is well communicated. Classroom relationships are very good and have a positive effect on learning. Teachers are good motivators and students work hard and are productive. The work is well planned and matched both to examination board requirements and to the individual needs of students. The work is made interesting with a variety of strategies including placements in the community, visits and speakers. Assessment is accurate and teachers give good feedback to students about how to improve. Students have a good attitude and act on the advice given. Students hold very positive views about the subject and say that it is well matched to their future career aspirations.
231. Leadership and management are good. There is a clear shared vision for the subject and teachers work well as a team. The curriculum is well planned by the subject co-ordinator to take account of the widely differing needs of students of all abilities and backgrounds. The work of the department is monitored and evaluated with a view to improvement. The lack of a well resourced subject base adversely affects students' working facilities and they need an area for large scale displays.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school	2	2
How inclusive the school is		1
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	2	2
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	3	3
Overall standards achieved		3
Pupils' achievement	2	3
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities (ethos)		2
Attendance	5	5
Attitudes	2	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2	3
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		2
The quality of education provided by the school		2
The quality of teaching	2	3
How well pupils learn	2	3
The quality of assessment	3	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	2	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		2
Accommodation and resources	3	3
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	1	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		2
The quality of the school's links with the community	1	1
The school's links with other schools and colleges	1	1
The leadership and management of the school		2
The governance of the school	2	2
The leadership of the headteacher		2
The leadership of other key staff	2	2
The effectiveness of management	2	2

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