

INSPECTION REPORT

ST ANSELM'S COLLEGE

Prenton, Birkenhead

LEA area: Wirral

Unique reference number: 105114

Headteacher: Simon Duggan

Lead inspector: Ian Stuart

Dates of inspection: 29 November – 2 December 2004

Inspection number: 271838

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE

Type of school:	Grammar
School category:	Voluntary Aided (Catholic)
Age range of pupils:	11 – 18
Gender of pupils:	Male
Number on roll:	851
College address:	Manor Hill Prenton Birkenhead Merseyside
Postcode:	CH43 1UQ
Telephone number:	0151 6521408
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr B J Cummings
Date of previous inspection:	18 – 22 October 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COLLEGE

St Anselm's College is smaller than most secondary schools; it provides a grammar school education for boys, aged 11 to 18, who come from an extensive area within the Wirral peninsula. The college was founded by the Christian Brothers in the 1930s and, although its status has gone through a number of changes over the years, its principal aim has always been to provide selective education with a strong, explicit Catholic ethos for boys from Catholic families. At present the college is a Voluntary Aided selective boys' school within the Catholic diocese of Shrewsbury and the Wirral Local Education Authority. The majority of boys come from Catholic backgrounds, but about 15 per cent have no connections with the Catholic church. Pupils come from a wide range of social and economic circumstances, but, overall, these are more favourable than average. Relatively few join or leave the college other than at the usual times of admission or leaving. Pupils are selected by academic ability and their levels of attainment on entry are well above average in English, mathematics and science. Although the number of pupils with special educational needs, including Statements, is well below the national average, the number is higher than usually found in grammar schools. The most common needs are dyslexia and physical difficulties. No pupils are at an early stage of acquiring English, and virtually all pupils come from White-British backgrounds. The college is a specialist Technology College, jointly acquired with the local Catholic girls' grammar school. It received a School Achievement award in 2003, and also has the Sportsmark and Investors in People awards.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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20729	James Berry	Team inspector	Special educational needs English as an additional language Post-16 chemistry
4373	Peter McKenzie	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages Post-16 French
10209	Vincent Gormally	Team inspector	Design and technology Post-16 design and technology
1608	Ralph Higgs	Team inspector	History Post-16 history
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14704	Jeffrey Cooling	Team inspector	Geography
22723	Robert Hartman	Team inspector	Mathematics Post-16 mathematics
19015	Gordon Peacock	Team inspector	Science
19214	Geoffrey Price	Team inspector	English Post-16 English
17015	Lawrence Denholm	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT)
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31701	Graeme Rudland	Team inspector	Music
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

St Anselm's is a very good school. The boys are interested in their subjects and committed to hard work. There is a strong culture of achievement. Standards are high and achievement is very good overall. The college is a compassionate and very caring community, reflecting its Catholic ethos. This firm foundation supports pupils' personal development and the college's commitment to meeting the needs of all pupils. Under the excellent leadership of the headteacher, the college is well poised to improve standards further. It provides very good value for money.

The college's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The climate for learning is excellent, enabling pupils to develop excellent attitudes and relationships, achieve very well and behave very well.
- Very good teaching and the very strong commitment of staff to the success of their pupils contribute significantly to the high standards achieved in the college.
- Pupils are happy and hard working within a friendly and supportive environment, which is fully inclusive to all pupils, including those with special educational needs.
- Attendance is now excellent, reflecting the pupils' enjoyment of the college and the college's commitment to pupils' welfare.
- Outstanding leadership by the headteacher and governors, very ably supported by senior managers, is ensuring continuing improvement in teaching and standards.
- The life of the college is considerably enriched by the excellent opportunities for pupils that exist beyond the normal curriculum, especially in sport.
- A wider range of teaching styles and learning opportunities in some lessons would enable some pupils to reach still higher levels, especially in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form.
- Achievement in music in Years 8 and 9 and in French in some classes in Years 10 and 11 is not good enough.

Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Standards have risen considerably, though this is partly due to higher levels of attainment when pupils join the school. Evidence from this inspection indicates that standards are rising further at present, and are higher than recent examination results, with achievement now very good. In recent years, the college has tackled weaknesses in the information and communication technology (ICT) curriculum and resources vigorously, and, although there is still some way to go, improvement in this area of the college's work has been outstanding. Teaching has improved considerably, with tasks generally well matched to pupils' abilities, though opportunities to extend pupils' independent learning skills still need further development in some cases.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Overall achievement is very good. Pupils' standards rise in Years 7 to 9 from levels on entry which range from well above average in English, mathematics and science to average in some other

subjects. Standards in Years 9 and 11 are at least well above average in most subjects, with examples of very high standards in some. Analysis of results in recent years shows good achievement in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory achievement in Years 10 and 11, with good achievement overall. However, in 2004, the proportion of the highest A* and A grades at GCSE was higher than would be expected from earlier levels of attainment. Present achievement is very good overall; although achievement is still stronger in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 and 11, pupils sustain the high levels reached by Year 9. Though pupils do not do as well in aspects of music and French as in their other subjects, they are doing particularly well in English in Years 10 and 11.

Pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are very good. Their attitudes, relationships and present attendance levels are excellent, and overall behaviour is very good.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is very good. Overall, teaching and learning are very good, though they are better in Years 7 to 9 and in the sixth form than they are in Years 10 and 11, where pupils' achievement is also less strong. There is only a very small amount of unsatisfactory teaching. Teachers' expert subject knowledge, their planning and their high expectations of pupils and students are particular strengths that promote very good learning. The best lessons challenge pupils to reach their full potential by using interesting teaching methods that encourage active participation, creative thinking and independent learning. In some lessons, learning is more passive and pupils have fewer opportunities to extend their understanding. Learning is helped considerably by good assessment of pupils' work and the very good curriculum, which meets pupils' needs and different interests very well. Opportunities are greatly enhanced by the excellent extra-curricular enrichment activities; sport is a particular strength, and there is an outstanding range of other cultural, academic and recreational activities provided by staff for the boys. Care, guidance and support are very good, and the partnership with parents is good.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good. The headteacher provides excellent leadership, giving very clear direction to the future development of the college; he is very ably supported by senior managers and by the outstanding contribution of governors. Planning is very good, and is very closely linked with excellent arrangements to support the professional development of staff. Senior managers are generally very well supported by middle managers, whose strengths are improving overall despite some variations in their effectiveness. The college is capitalising very well on the opportunities of Technology College status, with considerable investment in new learning technologies.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE COLLEGE

Parents are extremely supportive of the college; their levels of satisfaction are much higher than usually found at most schools. They appreciate the high expectations the college has and the many opportunities it provides. They value the headteacher's leadership and the commitment of staff to pupils, especially when they have temporary or permanent special needs, though a few parents would like better and more regular information on their sons' progress. Nearly all pupils are also very pleased with their school. They believe it is a friendly and supportive place where they are safe and secure. They believe they are expected to work hard. They clearly have high expectations of themselves as they have some concerns about behaviour, which the inspection team finds to be very good overall, with a few exceptions.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Ensure that teaching methods in all lessons enable all pupils and students to flourish at their highest possible levels.
- Improve achievement in music in Years 8 and 9, and in French in Years 10 and 11.

SIXTH FORM

OVERALL EVALUATION

St Anselm's has a good sixth form with many very good and excellent features; cost-effectiveness is good. Standards are well above average in many subjects, though there is scope for still higher achievement in some. Teaching is very good overall, enabling most students to achieve well and many very well. Students are mature well-rounded young people.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Most students enjoy the sixth form and are proud to be part of it.
- The sixth form is extremely well led, with a friendly and very supportive atmosphere that encourages excellent attitudes, relationships and attendance.
- Sixth formers are very well involved in the life of the college as a whole and have very good opportunities to take responsibility.
- Staff are very committed to help and support students.
- A very wide range of opportunities, especially in sport, considerably enriches the lives of sixth formers.
- A wider range of teaching styles in some subjects and lessons would give more opportunities for students to work creatively and independently, and extend their horizons.
- Study facilities and recreational space for sixth formers are barely adequate and much of the sixth form area is shabby and unattractive.

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, but most, if not inspected in detail, were sampled.

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Very good in English literature. Standards are well above average. Very positive attitudes and very good teaching enable students to achieve very well. Good in French. Students learn well because of very good teaching, but speaking skills are not as good as other skills.
Mathematics	Good in mathematics. Standards are above average; good teaching, combined with students' positive attitudes, results in good achievement.
Science	Good in chemistry. The interesting course promotes good achievement and above average standards; assessment is excellent.
Humanities	Very good in history. Standards are well above average. Teaching is very good; students have excellent attitudes and achieve very well.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Good in design and technology. Standards and the numbers taking the course are improving; teaching and learning are good.
Visual and performing	Very good in art. Students' work is highly individual, creative

arts and media	and imaginative; standards are now well above average.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Very good in physical education. Standards are well above average, with very good teaching leading to very good learning.
Business	Satisfactory in business studies. Standards are average. Teaching is variable; some is good and very good, but some is not challenging enough.

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

The overall quality of advice, guidance and support is very good. Students receive very good help and support from both teaching staff and their tutors. The mentoring programme for students in difficulty is excellent. Careers advice for students applying to higher education and for employment is good. Students' facilities for private study and research are only just satisfactory.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management are very good overall. The head of sixth form provides excellent leadership and is a very effective co-ordinator for an able team of staff. He has a vision as to how the sixth form should develop and flourish. His relationships with students and his commitment to the sixth form are excellent, with the sixth form council able to influence matters relevant to the sixth form.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students are strongly supportive of their sixth form. Students feel that the advice on how to achieve higher standards and cope with all the pressures is a major strength. Some feel that the advice they received before entering the sixth form could be improved and many feel they were not fully prepared for all the demands placed on them. Inspectors agree with sixth formers that their study facilities are only satisfactory. Members of the inspection team enjoyed very much their conversations with sixth formers and thank them for their help and co-operation.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Standards of work seen during the inspection were high and sometimes very high, compared with schools nationally, in Years 9 and 11. Achievement – the measure of how well pupils are doing taking their progress and capability into account – is now very good. Standards in the sixth form are above and often well above those found nationally, and students are achieving well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Overall standards rise in Years 7 to 9, and high standards are sustained in Years 10 and 11.
- Although very good overall, achievement is stronger in Years 7 to 9 than it is in Years 10 and 11.
- Pupils are doing particularly well in English in Years 10 and 11. Overall, the proportion of A* and A grades is higher than would be expected from earlier levels of attainment.
- Pupils with special educational needs achieve very well because of the high quality support they receive.
- Pupils' achievement in music in Years 8 and 9, and in some classes in modern foreign languages in Years 10 and 11, is not good enough.

Commentary

1. Pupils' attainments in national tests in the core subjects (English, mathematics and science) taken in Year 6, before they join the college, are high compared with the averages nationally. However, pupils' scores have been in the lowest five per cent of grammar schools in most years, although their scores have been improving, particularly in the last two years. The judgement of the inspection team is that levels of attainment in other subjects are not as high on entry. They are above the national average in many subjects but in art and design, design and technology, ICT, music and physical education they are average. Taken as a whole, standards on entry are judged to be above average, but higher for the present Years 7 and 8 than in other year groups.

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

Standards in:	College results	National results
English	n/a (38.1)	n/a (32.1)
mathematics	41.5 (44.1)	35.5 (35.4)
science	37.6 (41.0)	33.1 (33.7)

There were 144 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year. Because of problems with marking the English papers across the country, English results for 2004 have not yet been published.

2. Over the last five years, results in the tests taken at the end of Year 9 in the core subjects have been high – well above the national average; in some recent years, they have been very high – in the top five per cent nationally – in science. The trend in Year 9 results has broadly followed the national trend in recent years.
3. Achievement from Year 7 to Year 9 is now very good; in Years 10 and 11 it is good, and, overall, achievement is very good. In work seen in Years 7 to 9 during the inspection, standards in nearly all subjects were well above average, though above average in design and

technology where starting points are lower. In most subjects this represents very good achievement, with pupils making rapid strides in their knowledge and understanding, as well as acquiring skills appropriate to particular subjects. It is only in music where achievement is unsatisfactory. After a good start in Year 7, standards drop in Years 8 and 9 because there is an over-emphasis on theory and notational work, which stifles interest. Whilst literacy skills develop very well in Years 7 to 9, fewer pupils than might be expected reach the highest levels by Year 9 because the highest attainers are not always stretched fully. Standards in modern foreign languages are above average by Year 9, but pupils' speaking skills are less well developed than their other language skills. The very good achievement in Years 7 to 9 in ICT from average starting points is related to pupils' enthusiasm, the development of their technical skills and the specialist teaching they receive; a similar situation exists in physical education and in art and design, both subjects where pupils make particularly impressive progress in Years 7 to 9. Pupils' standards in mathematics are high so they are able to use their mathematical skills very competently where they are needed in other subjects.

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

	College results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	92 (93)	51 (52)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	100 (98)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	97 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	366 (56.9)	282 (38.0)

There were 122 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year. The method of calculation of points scores changed in 2004; however, comparisons between college and national figures in each year are valid. Comparisons are with boys nationally both for Year 9 and for GCSE.

- Overall GCSE results have been well above average for the last five years, although, within this broad category, standards rose significantly in each of 2001, 2002 and 2003, with results in 2004 maintaining the 2003 level. The trend over these years has been above the national trend and recent results have been much higher than those at the time of the previous inspection. The picture shown in results in recent years has been one of good achievement overall from Year 7 to Year 11. Pupils have achieved well in comparison to those in similar grammar schools, although overall 'value added' information puts the 2004 results in the middle band for progress from Year 9 to GCSE. For a number of years, English and English literature have been the most consistently high performing subjects; art and design is showing the most rapid recent improvement in results.
- As stated above, overall achievement from Year 7 to Year 11 is now very good. The headteacher's excellent leadership, with its strong focus on raising standards, is having a significant impact on achievement. In work seen in Years 10 and 11 during the inspection, achievement is better than recent examination results indicate; achievement is judged good, though not as good as in Years 7 to 9, where it is very good. Overall standards are well above average. Structured writing is very good in history even if skills of handling and analysing historical data are not quite so good. Achievement in art and design, where the quality of mask-making is particularly notable, and in physical education is also very good. Achievement is likewise very good in English where very good teaching is enabling pupils to reach very high standards. Unlike other subjects, progress in English is better in Years 10 and 11 than it is in

Years 7 to 9. Although the geography results dipped in 2004, a thorough analysis of what went wrong, a well-organised curriculum, very good teaching and first-rate attitudes by pupils are now leading to much better achievement. However, in some classes in French in Years 10 and 11, achievement is unsatisfactory and standards are falling below average because pupils lack confidence to speak the foreign language and are not motivated sufficiently to overcome their problems. Although recent developments in ICT are not yet providing all Year 11 pupils with a taught course, standards in ICT in Year 10 are now well above average.

6. Pupils with special educational needs are achieving very well overall, in line with other pupils. Their needs are recognised; their progress is analysed against their individual educational plans, and they receive very high quality support. As a result, they are making very good progress towards their academic goals. There is very good provision for the gifted and talented. They are identified from their scores in national tests and in an ongoing process as they move through the school; they have clear targets to ensure that they reach their potential. Because non-Catholic pupils are so well integrated into the life of the college, they achieve as well as other pupils.

Sixth form

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	87.1 (90.6)	87.3 (91.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	30.2 (25.3)	28.9 (32.1)
Average point score per pupil	320 (244)	219 (220)

There were 70 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year. Comparisons are with boys nationally. Comparable figures for 2004 are not yet available.

7. The overall performance of students in Year 13 at A level in 2003 was well above the national average. Nationally comparable information for 2004 is not yet available, but results in 2004 are higher at the college than they were in 2003, with 44 per cent of grades at A or B and 97 per cent at A to E. In both years, the average point score has been enhanced by the success of many students in general studies. Analysis of results shows the college's overall results to be on average half a grade per subject higher than would be expected from the students' GCSE results. This represents good achievement. In 2004, and taking the last three years' average, there are few significant variations in the relative performance of subjects, but religious studies, general studies, art and design and government and politics have performed particularly well, and business studies and law less well.
8. In work seen during the inspection, overall standards were above average and high in some areas. Achievement is good, and there are many instances of very good achievement. But, sometimes, an over-emphasis in lessons on input by the teacher means that students have fewer opportunities than might be expected to show their flair and intellectual prowess to achieve at the very highest level. Where these opportunities do arise, there are few limits to what students can achieve with high standards reached. In English literature, for example, standards are high as a result of rigorous discussion and much challenge; students have good understanding and a confident grasp of ideas. They are articulate and assured because teachers give them encouragement to assume responsibility for their own learning, enabling them to explore complex ideas enthusiastically. There is very good achievement in history with rapid learning of techniques such as note taking; students can write mature, analytical essays and, as in English literature, understand complex sources. Standards in art continue to rise

with highly creative and imaginative work; students think for themselves and are articulate in expressing ideas. These are some examples of the best of sixth form achievement and of the high standards that many reach in these and other subjects. By contrast, when the main activity is taking down dictated notes or other passive learning, students' achievement is less. In business studies, standards are average with satisfactory achievement, although, as in other areas, where teaching is good, students' achievement is usually good.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Attendance is excellent this term and punctuality is very good. Attitudes to learning are exemplary and behaviour is very good. Aspects of personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are also very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attendance rates this term are very high; procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance are outstanding.
- Pupils' and students' attitudes are excellent, as are their relationships with others; they are happy, keen and proud of their college.
- Behaviour is very good overall both in lessons and around the college.
- The provision for pupils' and students' personal development is very good.
- Pupils' understanding of other cultural traditions is underdeveloped.

Commentary

9. Attendance for the last full college year was well above the national average. However, a handful of pupils whose attendance was poor because of various special mitigating circumstances depressed the overall attendance picture. This is no longer the case and, in the current school year to date, attendance, at almost 97 per cent, is at a very high level in all year groups. There is very little unauthorised absence, which is well below the national level. This reflects the outstanding way the college promotes attendance and follows up absences, and the excellent attitudes that pupils have. Punctuality on arrival at the college is very good apart from problems caused by late running buses. Timekeeping during the college day is also good.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (2002/3) (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	5.2	School data	0.1
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

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

10. Pupils are very keen to come to the college and are enthusiastic about all aspects of college life, reflecting their excellent attitudes to their college life as a whole and their excellent relationships with each other and with their teachers. They are full of praise for the interesting lessons they enjoy and the wide range of clubs and trips in which they actively participate. These extend pupils' personal development very well and instill in pupils a real desire to learn and succeed. Typically, pupils settle to work quickly, have very good concentration levels and answer questions eagerly. They follow instructions well, work hard, are keen to discuss their work and take pride in good presentation. Pupils relish challenge and this was often seen, for example, in physical education and art lessons.
11. Pupils are helpful and considerate and consistently behave very well. They have very high standards of what they expect of others and acknowledge that some behaviour does not always meet these very high expectations. Break-times and lunchtimes are pleasant and relaxed. At the beginning and end of the college day, pupils show good self-discipline as they make their way to and from the buses. Pupils show reverence during assemblies and prayer. Very high expectations are set for conduct and the college rigorously implements policies to achieve them. Bullying and racism seldom occur and are simply not tolerated; pupils acknowledge that the college's procedures deal swiftly and effectively with any instances that do occur. The exclusion rate is low for this type of school.

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

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	797	25	0
White – Irish	1	0	0
White – any other White background	10	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	8	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	3	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	2	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	1	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	2	0	0
Chinese	4	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	22	0	0

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

12. There is an atmosphere of trust, respect for all and a strong community spirit. Pupils say that they feel part of “something very special” when they attend the college. The ethos is very positive and the college mission statement is fully reflected in its work and practice. The close links with parishes, Masses, retreats and regular use of the prayer room and chapel effectively promote pupils’ good spiritual development. Positive reinforcement of gospel values and very high moral standards and the recognition of their intrinsic worth are real strengths. This helps pupils to be considerate and thoughtful in their approaches to others and have high expectations of their own behaviour. The qualities required to become more mature and responsible, as pupils get older, are promoted very well. Pupils’ confidence and self-esteem are excellent and they have very good social skills. Pupils appreciate their own cultural traditions well. There is good use of classic literature and a range of art to inspire and enrich learning. However, pupils’ understanding of the diversity and richness of other cultures is less well developed.

Sixth form

13. Students’ attitudes and their behaviour in lessons and during college life generally are excellent. Their attendance is very good; punctuality is good. They enjoy the freedom and privileges accorded to sixth form students. Students have a real thirst for learning and work in partnership with their teachers in pursuit of high standards. Their independence and willingness to learn outside the classroom are evidence of their commitment to fulfilling their

ambitions. Students demonstrate maturity and self-discipline and are keen to take on responsibility; prefects, for example, are good role models and good ambassadors for the college. They take an active part in the many enrichment activities including many sports, drama, fund-raising for a range of charities, the Friday club, the St Vincent de Paul Society (SVP) and retreats which enhance their personal development very well. Their only complaint was about the general shabbiness of their sixth form facilities and restricted recreational space, a view shared by the inspectors, though they acknowledge that some refurbishment has occurred recently.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the college is very good. Teaching and learning are very good overall, though with some variations. The curriculum is very good, with outstanding enrichment opportunities. The college cares for its pupils and students very well, and guidance is good. Partnerships with parents are good, as are links with other schools and colleges.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are very good overall, with little that is less than good and only a very small amount that is unsatisfactory. Assessment is good with many strengths.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Eighty five per cent of teaching is good or better, with 45 per cent very good, including a little that is excellent.
- Pupils' and students' learning is closely related to the quality of teaching.
- Teachers' subject expertise, their planning and their high expectations of pupils and students are particular strengths.
- Learning could be even better at times, particularly in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, if teachers always allowed pupils and students to develop their work creatively and independently.
- Assessment is good and the management of assessment information very good; in the sixth form, assessment and its management are better.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 163 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
9 (5.5%)	65 (39.9%)	64 (39.3%)	22 (13.5%)	3 (1.8%)	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.

14. Many factors contribute to the overall high quality of teaching indicated by the figures above. The college is well served by teachers who are experts in their subjects and nearly all lessons are taught by subject specialists. This expertise is a key ingredient in the high quality of much of the teaching as teachers' enthusiasm for their subject is transmitted to pupils, who then have confidence to learn from the logical and expert way teachers present their lessons. Most lessons are very well planned and address the needs of different pupils in the class very well, and high quality planning is central to the high expectations teachers have of pupils. Where these expectations are very high and challenging, the impact on pupils' learning is profound. The best teaching in ICT, for example, is inventive and very challenging; as a result, pupils make rapid strides in developing both their skills and understanding.
15. Other examples illustrate features of the high quality teaching and learning that is taking place. An excellent geography lesson on the water cycle had very clear objectives; there were imaginative teaching methods with plenty of pace and challenge. Practical work developed pupils' understanding to a high degree and awakened receptive minds to thinking about different ways in which the water cycle influenced the environment in different situations; pupils' learning in this lesson was excellent as they improved their knowledge, understanding and skills very considerably. Art and design provides very good examples of the impact of teaching on learning. Teachers' high levels of expertise rub off on the pupils, who are encouraged greatly to be creative and imaginative; as a result, they are confident in their own

abilities to be independent and extend their learning at the highest levels appropriate to themselves. With expert guidance from teachers on how and where to research, pupils are moving forward at a rapid rate. In English, in Years 10 and 11, through their very good subject knowledge, their very good relationships with pupils and their bringing of pupils' attention to the features of high quality work, teachers are drawing pupils out so that they achieve very well through their very good learning.

16. Within the overall context of very good teaching and learning, the range of teaching styles affects how far pupils' learning is extended. In science, for example, teaching is consistently good; lessons are interesting, challenging and enjoyable, with very good relationships and very good use of performance information. All this leads to good learning, but with a wider range of teaching styles, including more use of ICT as a learning tool, there is scope to bring learning to still higher levels, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Indeed, in several subjects across the curriculum, styles of teaching are sometimes somewhat rigid and narrow. This means that some teachers, in their natural desire for their pupils to do well in the examinations, are actually inhibiting pupils' creativity and ability to work independently to extend their learning. The styles they use are very effective in covering the necessary content and, because assessment is thorough and plenty of work is set and marked by teachers and learnt by pupils, there is good achievement. However, the really highest levels of achievement when pupils are inspired to 'take off' themselves are not always occurring. Where this inspiration does occur and pupils are actively challenged to participate, the depth of their learning and understanding is considerable. On rare occasions, sometimes, for example, in music in Years 8 and 9, there is not enough focus on meeting the needs of all pupils in the class, which, when combined with activities which do not stimulate pupils, leads to unsatisfactory outcomes. Similarly, there are occasions, for example in some French lessons in Years 10 and 11, where expectations are not high enough; as a result, pupils' attitudes are poorer and learning is not as good as it could be.
17. The management of assessment is very good because the quality of information and guidance to staff from senior managers is very good. A detailed policy for marking provides clearly set out procedures which meet national requirements whilst being flexible enough to meet the needs of different subjects. The overall quality of assessment by staff is good, but there is evidence that some assessments of pupils' work against national standards at the end of Year 9 have been generous, and this is clearly a problem when developing teaching strategies to raise pupils' standards.
18. Much useful data relating to pupil performance is provided for staff, and there are good systems in place which monitor the progress of individuals and highlight those who are underachieving. There is good involvement of the heads of year and the heads of key stages in monitoring the progress of individual pupils in order to identify needs and provide support to help them to improve. Similarly, the individual education plans of pupils with special educational needs are reviewed regularly, with appropriate input from staff, pupils, parents and outside agencies; the current position is established and new targets are set. These effective procedures greatly support the teaching and learning of pupils with special educational needs.
19. Pupils are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, although the quality of target setting and report writing is variable across subjects. The involvement of pupils in the assessment of their work is at least good in all subjects. It is very good in art, geography and ICT. The involvement of pupils in the assessment of their own work is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9 where it has not yet become fully embedded in all subjects. There is excellent practice in all aspects of assessment in science, where work is consistently marked constructively, and assessment information is used to review pupil groupings on a regular basis. All pupils have targets in the front of their books, and know exactly what they have to do to improve.

20. The quality of assessment has much improved since the last inspection, along with significant improvements in the quality of teaching. The continuing emphasis on strategies to improve further the already very positive aspects of teaching and assessment indicates that there is the potential for the quality of teaching and learning to reach even higher levels in the future.

Sixth form

21. Most of the characteristics of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11 also apply to the sixth form. No unsatisfactory teaching occurred in the sixth form lessons observed and nearly all was good or better. Overall, teaching and learning are very good, and are better than at the time of the previous inspection. The features that distinguish the very good and excellent from other teaching are similar to those in Years 10 and 11. In the best lessons students are challenged to think for themselves, are able to work actively and creatively and are inspired to develop their learning independently outside the lessons. Teachers' subject expertise, their very good and often excellent relationships with students and their desire to help students to succeed are features of virtually all lessons. However, a minority of lessons are over-dominated by the teacher, who is the main source of information, with relatively little direct input from students; in these lessons, their learning is generally effective because they are keen and appreciate the teacher's expertise, but learning does not always go as far as it might. Nonetheless, very effective teaching and learning take place in many lessons, and the following paragraph illustrates what is being achieved, drawing on examples across the sixth form curriculum.
22. English literature lessons are lively and enjoyable because of the dynamic teaching, which actively involves students; there are excellent relationships and marking is conscientious and detailed. Chemistry lessons stimulate students to think, and the interesting course and teachers' very good knowledge lead to enjoyable learning. Art lessons are very stimulating and the excellent guidance given to students extends their vision so that learning is very effective indeed. Teaching is also very good in history and physical education; in both subjects, very skilled teachers are able to communicate their expertise and enthusiasm to students and the relentless challenge and high expectations lead to very good learning. The one lesson observed in government and politics is an example of sixth form work at its very best. Students participated fully in a series of stimulating debates, using parliamentary style procedures, in assessing how effectively parliament carried out its different functions. By having three separate debates, the teacher gave excellent clarity of focus to the lesson and ensured a very brisk pace to proceedings; equally, his limited but incisive comments lifted the level of discussion to very high levels whilst enabling the students to be the driving forces in the invigorating active thinking. Students were expected to be well informed and to participate, and their capacity to work creatively and collaboratively was excellent. The excellent lesson was conducted in a splendid atmosphere of trust, respect and intellectual rigour with very high outcomes.
23. The very good quality of assessment procedures and processes in the sixth form make very good contributions to the overall quality of teaching and learning. The college uses a system of target setting based on students' prior achievement. Through this, students are fully involved in their own target setting and this encourages them to aim for the highest possible standards. The management of assessment in the sixth form is excellent. Rigorous analysis of data, based on comparisons with the highest achieving schools, provides challenge to staff and students, which helps to raise standards. There is very good practice in art, geography, history and ICT, and excellent practice in chemistry, where staff make full use information about students' achievement to inform the planning of their teaching.

The curriculum

The curriculum in the main school and the sixth form is very good. Opportunities for enrichment are excellent. The match of teachers and support staff to the curriculum is very good; accommodation and resources are satisfactory overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Enrichment activities are outstanding especially in sports and games.
- The open choice option systems for GCSE and the sixth form offer excellent opportunities for all pupils and students to study a very wide range of subjects.
- There is a very good range of language and science provision.
- The college is very well staffed by well-qualified teachers.
- There are some weaknesses in the provision of music in Years 8 and 9 and ICT in Year 11.

Commentary

24. The curriculum in Years 7 to 11 is very good. The range of subjects caters very well for the particular interests and needs of the pupils, but there are a few weaknesses in the music provision in Years 8 and 9. The very considerable improvements in provision for ICT have not been fully implemented in Year 11 where there is still not enough provision. However, this problem will disappear next year when present Year 10 pupils continue their course into Year 11. The Catholic ethos of the school is very strong and religious studies is a core element within the curriculum, with ten per cent of curriculum. Despite a somewhat longer teaching week than in most schools, this has an impact on the other core subjects, which have a little less time than is usual. Whilst this has no serious impact on standards overall, it does mean that some subjects are not able to extend topics as much as they would wish. Similarly, whilst the weekly pattern of 40 lessons of 40 minutes each gives a good deal of timetabling flexibility, the time span when the lesson is only 40 minutes long is sometimes not enough for the full development of the lesson's content and learning opportunities.
25. The college ensures that all pupils have excellent access to the subjects offered in a fully inclusive way. The very well organised special educational needs department and the effective responses of teachers ensure that pupils with special educational needs have full access to the curriculum. Strengths lie in the breadth of subjects both in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 to 11. All pupils in Year 7 play a musical instrument. In Years 8 and 9, all pupils study Latin as well as two modern foreign languages from the range of French, Spanish and German. In Years 10 and 11, pupils have a choice of any three optional subjects and the timetable is tailored to meet their needs. In 2004 all pupils were able to study the subjects of their first choice. All pupils in Year 10 study ICT as a separate subject and pupils have the option in both Years 10 and 11 of taking three separate science subjects or the double-award science course. Pupils are offered a particularly broad curriculum in art and design with very good three-dimensional provision. The introduction of citizenship into the curriculum has been very well handled and provision is very good; provision for work related learning (WRL) is good.
26. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is taught in tutor groups during a period in the timetable which changes each week. It is augmented by topics covered in assemblies. The programmes of study and inspection evidence of work in PSHE indicate that provision is good. The requirements for sex and relationships education and health and drugs awareness are met, with part of the course covered in religious studies and science lessons. There are good opportunities for pupils to debate and to work effectively in groups in many curricular areas.
27. Opportunities for enrichment are outstanding. A very large number of sports teams in each year group: fifty per cent of all boys in the college play in a rugby team. Standards are very high; for example, the college is the national champion in cross-country. There are several teams in hockey, basketball, badminton and tennis. The opportunities for pupils to participate and excel in sport are enormous. However, there is also a very wide range of other activities within the college. There are many opportunities to visit theatres, meet writers and to take part in Readerthons and writing clubs. There are many activities for the gifted and talented students, including participating in the science Olympics, visiting the Tate, citizens advice bureau, Hawkstone Park and Birdoswald. The overall provision for gifted and talented pupils

is well planned, co-ordinated and evaluated, supporting those who have a flair for specific subjects but are not necessarily gifted across all subjects. In addition, there is an abundance of lunchtime activities, including very good access to ICT facilities. There are regular ski trips and sporting tours abroad, the most recent being the senior rugby squad tour to Canada.

28. The college has sufficient well-qualified and suitably experienced teaching staff. The match of teachers to the curriculum is very good. Non-teaching staff provide good support and work well with pupils and teachers. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well as a result of the encouragement and help they receive in lessons from teaching assistants. In science, design and technology, art and ICT, non-teaching staff enhance the work through knowledgeable and conscientious technical support. The college makes good use of assistants, with duties allocated to faculties to help with tasks such as the production of resources and displays. Learning mentors provide very good support for pupils who need additional encouragement to ensure they fulfil their potential.
29. Accommodation is satisfactory overall, though it ranges from excellent to barely satisfactory. Newly built facilities for modern foreign languages and mathematics are excellent; these and modern facilities for physical education are clearly benefiting these subject by providing very good learning environments. In the older parts of the building, many subjects are taught in rooms which are generally small and beginning to show their age. In some cases, particularly in the sixth form block, in science, and in design and technology, pupils, students and staff have to cope in environments which do not inspire learning. It is to their enormous credit that in none of these cases are learning and achievement being hindered. The buildings and grounds are treated with respect by pupils and students and this is a major factor in keeping those parts which are barely adequate in a sufficiently satisfactory state to continue to serve their purpose. The college's playing fields are two miles from the main buildings, but sensible timetabling and full co-operation with the arrangements by pupils, students and staff ensure that difficulties are kept to a minimum.
30. Resources for learning are satisfactory. The proportion of the total college budget allocated to resources for learning is higher than is typically found in secondary schools. This reflects particularly the continuing, and necessary, high levels of investment in ICT, which are now very much improved from the time of the previous inspection. Resources are allocated sensibly in accordance with a formula. A proportion of funds is retained for contingencies, and awards from this are given in relation to the college and departmental development plans. Interactive whiteboards and laptop computers are provided widely across subjects and are being increasingly effectively used.

Sixth form

31. Most of the comments made above are equally applicable to the sixth form. The sixth form curriculum is largely academic, but there is a very wide range of subjects, and careful timetabling ensures that nearly all requests can be met. Although numbers are small, language provision is particularly rich, with three modern foreign languages and Latin. In recent years provision has steadily increased as the sixth form has grown, and many of the extensions to the curriculum have increased the number of advanced level courses that have a vocational bias; some are taught as part of a collaborative arrangement with another school. A strength of the sixth form curriculum is the general studies programme, which contains many topics which significantly enrich and extend students' experiences. The results in 2004 at both AS and A level indicate that previous students benefited considerably from the general studies course; inspection evidence indicates that present students are also benefiting considerably. The enrichment provided by general studies is further considerably enhanced by the excellent

provision for extra-curricular activities described above, in which sixth formers participate in the same positive ways as pupils in the rest of the school.

32. Staffing, accommodation and resources for sixth formers have the same characteristics as those for the rest of the college. However, the sixth form block, despite some refurbishment of a few rooms using Technology College funds, is shabby and unattractive, and study space and recreational space are only just satisfactory for the large numbers of sixth formers now in the college. Students acknowledge these weaknesses, and the slowness of some of the computers they use, with good grace, but their facilities are poorer than those typically found in sixth form areas elsewhere.

Care, guidance and support

The care, welfare, health and safety of pupils are very effective, ensuring the full inclusion of all pupils. Support, advice and guidance, based on the monitoring of pupils' achievements and personal development, are very good. The involvement of pupils through seeking, valuing and acting on their views is also very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The focus on building self-esteem and confidence in an inclusive and compassionate community is a key strength of the college.
- The holistic approach to supporting and guiding pupils and students is very good.
- The arrangements for pupils' induction are very good.
- The college values pupils' and students' opinions very well and these inform the college's improvement plans.
- Routine safety electrical checking is overdue and is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

33. The college's caring ethos permeates throughout, especially when it comes to the care of pupils and the promotion of their personal growth. Pupils confirm strongly that they value the excellent relationships with staff and would always have someone to turn to care for them if they were worried or troubled. The college's supportive and caring culture is seen at its best when pupils with a range of complex needs, including medical, sensory and physical disability, are supported on an individual basis so that they can fully access the curriculum and enjoy college life.
34. Very effective monitoring of academic progress and personal development enables any underachievement and special circumstances to be identified at an early stage. Pupils from any ability level whose progress slips are identified; high quality mentoring halts any further regression and helps to resolve issues. Pupils are helped to organise their work and manage their time better and the results are impressive. The GCSE results for those borderline pupils who received mentoring were much better than expected. Pupils' knowledge of their own performance is very good and most know what to do to achieve higher levels in most subjects. Pupils also receive very good guidance on how to improve personally; some comments about careers guidance are made in the section on work related learning (WRL).
35. The induction arrangements are very good. Year 7 pupils are pleased at how quickly they settled and mastered the daily routines and the complex campus when they started at the college. They felt welcomed at the inaugural Mass and the induction retreat was very good. They also appreciate the help they get from their tutor group sixth former, who helps them on an on-going daily basis.
36. The college council is very well established and each year group is ably led by sixth formers, who help to channel ideas forward to the senior management. Pupils feel that this is a

listening school and their ideas do form part of the college's improvement plans. They were very pleased at recent improvement to the food menus which came at their suggestion. The college also undertakes surveys of pupils, which canvass their views very well, test satisfaction levels and help to address issues.

37. The management of health and safety is very good and most of the routine checking systems are in place. The college is aware, however, that the electrical checking of both fixed and portable appliances is overdue and needs urgent attention. Despite this concern, the college's guidance and protection of pupils have improved since the last inspection.

Sixth form

38. Students receive very good help and support from both teaching staff and their tutors. Students feel that the advice on how to achieve higher standards and cope with all the pressures is a major strength. The mentoring programme for students in difficulty is excellent. Some students feel that the advice they received before entering the sixth form could have been better and many feel they were not fully prepared for all the demands placed on them. Careers advice for students applying to higher education and for employment is good.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The college's links with parents are good. Links with the local community, other schools and colleges are also good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents are very supportive of the college and are very pleased about most aspects of the college's work.
- Reports do not always include sufficiently clear information on pupils' progress.
- Links with community enrich learning and pupils' personal development.
- Links with a technology focus across the local educational community provide exciting and creative learning experiences.

Commentary

39. Parents have very high levels of confidence in the college in almost every area and feel part of a strong and welcoming family community. Parents feel a true sense of partnership based on good two-way communications and mutual trust. Minor concerns about the information they receive on their children's progress were raised, and the inspection team believes these concerns are justified. Although college reports are satisfactory overall, subject reporting is inconsistent and some subjects are reported inadequately with as little as one line of text on progress. Some of the targets for improvement are too general to be useful and are not specific to the subject. However, parents of pupils with special educational needs are well informed; they are invited to take part in reviews of individual educational plans and discuss how they could help their sons towards the targets outlined in the plans. Other information like newsletters, the school web site and other booklets is good and keeps parents in touch with college activities.
40. The college has a deservedly good reputation for developing technology related learning across the community. It is a focal point for many community groups, including the Life Long Learning classes, parent projects and the Chamber of Commerce seminars; this is a notable initiative resulting from the college's becoming a Technology College. There are many visits and visitors to enrich learning in areas such as personal and social education where local expertise is used very well. Links with local parishes and the Christian Brothers are good and enhance personal development, especially the spiritual and moral aspects. Links with local businesses extend careers education and guidance and provide for a good biennial Careers

Convention. Pupils enjoy serving their community and the SVP group (St Vincent de Paul Society) helps to raise large sums for good causes and support the local elderly.

41. The college's plans as a result of gaining Technology College status are already enhancing its links with other schools and colleges. There are very good technology links with primary schools and exciting opportunities to take part in science, design and technology, ICT and mathematics projects, events and master classes. The curricular links are strong and significantly benefit learning. There are also good links with universities as part of the Wirral Initial Teacher Training consortium through which many trainee teachers help to support learning very well. The college makes special arrangements with local colleges for work related learning and for pupils to explore other post-16 opportunities.

Sixth form

42. Links with the community are very good and there are many chances to extend learning and take part in worthwhile community service activities. The Friday Club and the links with a local special school offer some very special mutual benefits. There are strong links with the partner joint technology school where there are many shared resources to deliver a varied and broad curriculum and enhance the key areas of technology, mathematics, science and ICT. Less strong are community links involving the A-level business studies course where there are only limited links with the business community to support and extend the course.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good. The headteacher provides excellent leadership, giving very clear direction to the future development of the college; he is very ably supported by senior managers and by the outstanding contribution of governors.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher, senior managers and governors have a very accurate view of the college's strengths and weaknesses and have a very clear view of necessary developments for the future.
- The college is capitalising very well on the opportunities that Technology College status has given it.
- Development planning is very good, linked very closely with excellent professional development for staff.
- Leadership and management of middle managers are improving and are now very good with some excellent features.
- The sixth form is very well led and managed, with excellent leadership from the head of sixth form.

Commentary

43. The governing body is extremely effective. It is very well organised with a strong committee structure, enabling it to be very closely involved with all aspects of the college's work and still have a very coherent overall entity. It has a very clear vision of what the college should stand for, a very shrewd understanding of the college's strengths and also a determination to drive the college forward without losing the excellent ethos that has been established over many years. In recent years it has presided over many building projects and is well aware of how much more needs to be done and the consequent financial implications. A powerful aspect of the governors' practice is the annual residential weekend with senior managers, aided by a facilitator, when creative and detailed thinking, as well as review, can take place in the crucial process of formulating the college development plan. Because of the considerable strengths of

the governors' working practices, the considerable range of their expertise and experience, and their commitment to the college, the governors successfully both challenge and support senior managers and play an excellent role in helping to shape the vision and direction of the college. They also apply the principles of best value very well.

44. The headteacher has made a very significant impact on the college in the relatively short time he has been in post. He has very successfully maintained the college's underlying and well established strengths as a compassionate, orderly and friendly Catholic school whilst bringing a sharp focus on raising standards and an insistence that only the best will do. He has succeeded in taking staff, pupils and students with him in this commitment to continual improvement, and the results of this are having a particularly marked effect in Years 7 to 9 where achievement is now very good; the impact has not yet been as strong in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, but the indications are very encouraging that further improvement will take place, especially when younger pupils move through the college. The headteacher's sense of purpose and his high aspirations are excellent, with the emphasis, quite properly, on leading and managing improvements in teaching. Other senior managers have complementary skills and a very wide range of experience; collectively they provide very effective partners with the headteacher in promoting a culture of improvement and excellence, bringing a rigour to the analysis of whole college and faculty performance that is very commendable.
45. Leadership and management by heads of subject and faculty are very good overall, though with more variable quality. In three crucial areas of special educational needs, ICT and citizenship, where co-ordination across the college as a whole is fundamental for success, leadership and management are excellent, with very effective organisation. Leadership and management are very good in art and design, history and physical education. In most subject areas, subject leaders set a good example by their own practice and have clear views about future developments. Less well developed in some areas is the management of the quality of teaching and of pupils' progress through effective assessment. Some of the keys to further improvements in teaching are the effective sharing of good practice and the rigorous analysis of teaching methods for their impact on pupils' learning: where these are managed well, improvement is consistently good; in some subjects, particularly music and modern foreign languages, more needs to be done to ensure this consistency of good practice.
46. A very considerable strength of the college is the attention given to the recruitment, retention and professional development of all staff; the award of Investor in People (IiP) status is one indication of the quality of the college's staffing procedures. Great care is taken by governors and senior managers to analyse the needs of the college when appointments are made. This assures that there is an appropriate match of expertise and experience to the post. Following appointment, all newly recruited staff benefit from the very good induction programme that assists them to settle in. Newly qualified teachers receive very good support because of the welcoming ethos of the college and the excellent programme, which is well organised, closely monitored and thoroughly evaluated. The college also makes a very good contribution to training teachers to the mutual benefit of the college and the trainees. The college has successfully implemented the national remodelling of the workforce agreement and made every good use of the opportunities to review teachers' workload and appoint appropriate support staff. In addition to premises, supervisory, administrative and clerical staff the college has further strengthened arrangements for financial and data management. Staff performance management is very good and has a clear and positive impact on strategies for planning improvement. All teaching and non-teaching staff are included in the college's rigorous programme of self-evaluation and annual performance review by senior staff. Lesson observations, pupils' work and performance are monitored and evaluated and outcomes are used in setting challenging targets for staff.
47. One of the most significant developments in recent years has been the college's acquiring specialist Technology College status, jointly with Upton Hall School. This has been managed

very well and various references to its impact have been made in this report. In achieving this status both institutions have retained their unique identities but have formed a joint body to enhance learning opportunities. There has been considerable investment in learning technologies with a greatly increased number of networked terminals, interactive whiteboards and laptop computers available to assist learning, and the installation of advanced CAD/CAM equipment in the technology area. Good working relationships with partner primary and secondary schools have developed so that they benefit from the resources and expertise that the school is building up. A range of activities such as mathematics road shows from Liverpool University and industrial training in the use of control technology has occurred, and the community dimension has been enhanced by the establishment of adult and community

courses with a strong technology focus. Staff are developing their expertise in making best use of the growing resource base, but, in some cases, further training is needed to fully translate the resources into improved practice.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004 (College roll 849)

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3,140,949	Balance from previous year	100,993
Total expenditure	3,110,207	Balance carried forward to the next	131,735
Expenditure per pupil	3,663		

48. Financial management is very good, and is clearly linked to the college's priorities within its development plan and future strategic objectives. Patterns of expenditure are logical within the overall budget, though somewhat more is spent on the sixth form than would usually be expected in relation to the funding provided for the sixth form; nonetheless, the cost-effectiveness of the sixth form is good. Day-to-day financial control and monitoring are very good indeed, with governors and senior managers fully conversant with the financial position as the financial year develops. At present, there are prudent, but not excessive, balances, the use of most of which is planned for strategic developments in the short and medium term. Overall, the college gives very good value for money.

Sixth form

49. Leadership and management of those with responsibilities for the sixth form are very good overall. The head of sixth form provides excellent leadership and is a very effective co-ordinator for an able team of staff. He has a vision of how the sixth form should develop and flourish, which is continually modulated by taking into account the views of the headteacher, the governors and the students themselves. His relationships with students and his commitment to the sixth form are excellent. Meetings with the sixth form link governor and residential weekends for the senior managers and governors provide valuable time for the interchange of ideas, as does the sixth form council, allowing the head of sixth form to produce a very focused and useful development plan. The sixth form council has a wide remit that extends to the quality of teaching and its deliberations do result in positive action being taken. Students are well served by the extensive analysis of their individual progress, which results in individual discussions pointing the way forwards. Teaching is monitored by performance and, where weaknesses are perceived, remedial action is taken, including the establishment of success criteria.

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

Work related learning (WRL)

Provision for work related learning (WRL) is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Work experience is well planned for all pupils in Year 11.
- Good opportunities for WRL have been identified in many areas of the curriculum through an audit of what occurs in subject areas.
- A WRL co-ordinator has been appointed and an evaluation of current activities is in place.
- Several departments have good links with industry and commerce, though no enterprise opportunities are available for pupils in Years 10 and 11.
- The attractive careers room is well stocked.
- The biennial careers convention for Year 9 and above is well regarded by local employers.

Commentary

50. The one week of work experience is well organised to ensure that all Year 11 pupils have relevant and interesting work placements locally, in Europe and in the United States. Pupils are well prepared for their placements through the PSHE lessons and then their experiences of WRL through work are carefully followed up afterwards and discussed in their tutor groups. Following a review of the system, next year's work experience will take place in Year 10.
51. The dedicated careers area is an attractive room, contributing well to WRL for work; it is well stocked with information relating to a very wide range of jobs. All Year 11 pupils who are considering a career or further education and training are offered a series of individual interviews with the Connexions adviser. There is a biennial careers convention, which is well supported by a diverse range of institutions, companies and several further and higher education institutions. This is very well attended by pupils, students and their parents. In addition, many Year 11 students attend the Job Scene exhibition in Liverpool. This provides a further opportunity for pupils to meet a very wide range of employers and education and training providers.
52. All subject schemes of work have been reviewed through a comprehensive curriculum audit in Years 10 and 11 following the appointment of a WRL co-ordinator. The contribution of each subject to WRL has been thoroughly mapped and logged. There are good opportunities within many subjects for pupils to develop the knowledge and skills of work related learning. In the science area, for example, pupils study chemistry through an analysis of the steel, aluminium and crude oil industries. Many Year 10 pupils visit Unilever to learn about product design and marketing. The project work in ICT is based on real industrial case studies and representatives from many of these companies visit the college. Some of the language work in the three modern foreign languages is focused on business language, with role play activities developing interview skills. Some pupils follow this up in Year 11 with a European work placement. One of the units in GCSE English is "the world of work", in which pupils examine different experiences of work. Much of the design and technology syllabus includes product analysis and the examination of client-designer relationships. During the inspection week a visit was made to the borough's learning centre to further the pupils' knowledge of manufacturing. These contributions are to be thoroughly assessed and reviewed in the spring term and their effectiveness analysed.

53. WRL is well led and managed. The co-ordinator has a clear view of the strengths of the provision and he has put in place an effective monitoring structure. He knows there are still some gaps in what is already good provision and has plans for further improvements; although there are enterprise days in the sixth form, there are no similar opportunities in Years 10 and 11 as yet.

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 **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching in Years 10 and 11 enables pupils to achieve outstanding GCSE results in English.
- Very positive attitudes in lessons help pupils by Year 11 to make very good improvement on their standards when they joined the college.
- Insufficient challenge for the most capable pupils in Years 7 to 9 results in fewer than expected achieving the highest levels in the national tests in Year 9.
- Good management and very good leadership have helped to raise standards in English.

Commentary

54. Pupils enter the college with well above average standards in English. Good teaching helps them to sustain these standards in Years 7 to 9. This represents good achievement. Although the official results are not yet available for the 2004 national tests, Year 9 pupils gained results that are likely to be well above the national average for all schools. The proportion of pupils achieving Levels 6 and 7 was less far ahead of the national average than in mathematics and science and lower than might be expected. This is because lessons in Years 7 to 9 do not consistently stretch the highest-attaining pupils in appropriate ways. In Years 10 and 11 pupils achieve very well because teaching is very good. GCSE English examination results for 2004 were outstanding and very high compared with national averages. The proportion of pupils gaining A* or A grades was also very high. Results for English literature were well above the national average.
55. By Year 9 pupils produce work that is consistently well above average. Speaking and listening skills are very well developed, and oral work is well above average. Group discussions are lively and fruitful. Most pupils talk confidently using a wide range of vocabulary and appropriate expression. Thus Year 9 pupils are able to conduct lively debates on topical issues addressing their audience engagingly and persuasively. Reading aloud is fluent and expressive so that meaning is clearly conveyed. Large numbers of pupils make good use of the library to extend their reading. Standards of reading are generally well above average. Written work is of an equally high standard. Pupils write easily and at length for a variety of purposes. Short stories have lively narrative, strong characterisation and vivid description. Discursive writing is very well ordered and follows a clear line of argument. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 only occasionally use their well above average skills in ICT to produce work in English. By Year 11 most pupils are confident speakers in a range of situations. They listen carefully in discussion and respect others' views. Essays are very well argued and make very good use of textual evidence. They often display an impressive understanding of literature, as seen, for example, in the thorough analyses of the opening chapter of Dickens' *Great Expectations*. Pupils plan and present written work very well, often making good use of ICT. They take great pride in their work.
56. Learning and teaching are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Although teaching is generally good, programmes of lessons in Years 7 to 9 are not sufficiently well

planned to give pupils in different classes an equally well-balanced and appropriate provision. Higher-attaining pupils are not consistently stretched to produce their best, because, although teachers actively involve pupils in lessons so that they learn quickly, they are not always encouraged to use their imagination to take their thinking a further stage forward. Nonetheless, in a very good Year 9 lesson, pupils made important gains in poetry writing skills and in consolidating their knowledge of characters in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, when they were stimulated to produce well-crafted poems in a very short time. In Years 10 and 11 pupils learn particularly well because teachers continually draw their attention to the features of high quality work. Because teachers are usually dynamic and enthusiastic in the classroom, pupils respond very well and bring the same qualities to their own work, with very beneficial results. Lessons are usually challenging so that pupils enjoy English and make very good progress. Teachers focus steadily on good use of language in lessons and when marking books to ensure that pupils talk and write using appropriate and accurate English; overall, assessment is very good. As a result, standards of literacy are consistently high.

57. Management of the department is good and leadership is very good. Teachers work well as a team although teaching in scattered locations about the college. New teachers have very good support. Outside the classroom pupils have very good opportunities, for example in the regular dramatic productions, to enrich their learning. Good improvement has taken place since the previous inspection, particularly in the achievement of pupils by Year 11.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

58. Pupils enter the college with well above average English language and literacy skills, and these are progressively developed in all years, sustaining the well above average standards by Year 9 and Year 11. By Year 11, they speak and write fluently and they can interpret and evaluate the texts used in all subjects. They make very good progress because of the very good work of the literacy co-ordinators in disseminating and evaluating good practice. There is a willingness on the part of all staff to incorporate this practice into their teaching. There are effective teaching strategies in place in all subjects to promote good speaking and listening skills. Support for all aspects of literacy are particularly strong in English and geography where there is clear emphasis throughout on using language accurately. Pupils answer at length and speak in sentences in most subjects. There are good practices in all lessons to clarify definitions and ensure the correct understanding of language; the subject specific vocabulary is taught well. The learning support assistants give good, specific support and encouragement to pupils who fall behind in language and literacy. The librarian works closely with subject leaders to promote opportunities for pupils to develop their language and literacy skills, particularly to extend their reading.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement by some pupils in French in Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory, particularly because of weak speaking skills in the foreign language.
- Teaching and learning policies are not consistently implemented across the faculty.
- Staffing and learning resources are very good, and accommodation is now excellent.
- There is a wide provision for languages in the college.
- The developing provision for Spanish is a positive development.

Commentary

59. In 2003 Spanish took over from French as the first modern foreign language studied from Year 7. Pupils now study German or French as a second language from Year 8. All pupils study at least one modern foreign language to GCSE, and all languages are available in the sixth form. Evidence from the inspection of all three languages contributes to judgements on overall provision in modern foreign languages.
60. Standards in French, assessed by the teachers, at the end of Year 9 were well above average in 2003 and improved further in 2004. Overall standards seen in all three languages during the inspection are above average by Year 9, with pupils less competent in speaking than in listening, reading and writing.
61. The 2003 GCSE results in Spanish and French were well above average and above average in German. In Spanish and German, pupils did as well as in their other subjects but they did less well in French. In 2004, results were similar in French and Spanish and significantly higher in German. However, present standards seen in French in Years 10 and 11 are below average, where speaking is again the weakest skill. Standards in German and Spanish are higher and are above average.
62. Pupils start their language learning in the college by making very good progress. Overall achievement by Year 9 is good in all three languages. Pupils are approaching the learning of Spanish in Years 7 and 8 with enthusiasm; as a result, they are making very good progress and achieving very well in Spanish in these years. The introduction of Spanish as the first modern foreign language studied is having a positive effect on present achievement in Years 7 and 8. Taken overall, achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good in the three different languages studied by the pupils, including, in Year 9, French as the first and Spanish and German as the second modern foreign languages. Those with special educational needs and gifted and talented pupils achieve as well as others because their respective needs are well known by teachers. However, the picture in Years 10 and 11 is much more mixed. Achievement in German and Spanish is satisfactory, but overall progress and achievement in French are unsatisfactory, mainly because of the negative attitudes of a minority of pupils who are dragging down standards.
63. The major problem in French is that, although pupils in Years 10 and 11 clearly understand the French they hear and read, many lack confidence in speaking. This lack of confidence is mainly the result of the inconsistent implementation of the faculty's teaching and learning policy. Whilst the policy requires teachers to use the foreign language as an essential part of the teaching process, some teachers do not always do so. They do not have high enough expectations of pupils' speaking skills and accept standards that are far too low. Because pupils are not always well taught, the attitudes of some of them deteriorate, resulting in still more unsatisfactory achievement for these pupils, and, indeed, other well-behaved pupils who lack motivation. Overall standards are not as good as they should be, and the number of pupils who achieve the highest levels at GCSE is lower than it should be. Nonetheless, there are many positive aspects of teaching and learning of modern foreign languages, and, taking Years 7 to 11 as a whole, they are good. Teaching and learning are good in all three languages in Years 7 to 9, with particular strengths in Spanish in Years 7 and 8. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall in all three languages in Years 10 and 11, though there is some unsatisfactory teaching in French in Years 10 and 11. There is some very good teaching. For example, a lively Year 8 Spanish lesson combined the use of new words in well-practised structures; it had good pace and challenge, with the teaching driving the learning entirely in Spanish and with a high degree of energy. The high quality of a Year 8 French lesson was related to the teacher's skill in supporting the least able whilst challenging the most able. She used a very good range of resources including a multi-media presentation and the 'smartboard' with words, drawings and sentences dancing all over the place! The two-sided

dialogue cards for paired words were also effective, though the foreign language assistant only worked with a group of pupils for some of the lesson. There is much good work going on in modern foreign languages, but it is not consistent in all lessons, especially in Years 10 and 11.

64. Leadership and management are satisfactory, with satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection. Day-to-day organisation and planning are good and there is a strong developing team ethos, with other teachers taking responsibility for areas of work. There is a flourishing languages club, and annual foreign visits have a language focus. The departmental handbook is a good document but some policies, particularly in connection with teaching and learning, are not being consistently interpreted by teachers nor monitored effectively. Curriculum provision is very good, providing every pupil with the opportunity to learn two modern foreign languages from Year 8 onwards. However, the number learning two languages in Years 10 and 11 is disappointingly small given the generous provision in Years 7 to 9. Pupils make limited use of computers to support their learning, but there is now clear potential for development as new resources become available. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. The excellent new building provides much improved accommodation, and the introduction of Spanish as the first language is helping to increase the popularity of language learning. However, test and examination results remain similar, and some standards have fallen, with speaking standards now causing concern. Potentially, languages could improve significantly, providing the weaknesses identified at this inspection are addressed rigorously.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is very good because teachers are committed, have an excellent subject knowledge and an appreciation of common misconceptions.
- Good relations between pupils and teachers ensure good progress.
- Most lessons proceed at a brisk pace with good levels of challenge for pupils.
- The constraints of timetabling produce a pattern of lessons that is not ideal, and mathematics has less teaching time than in most local schools.
- There is insufficient planned use of the library to support and enrich learning.

Commentary

65. Achievement by Year 11 is very good because of the very good achievement made in Years 7 to 9, followed by good achievement in Years 10 and 11. Standards are well above those found nationally. In 2004, results in the Year 9 tests and in the GCSE examination were well above the national averages. Over the last few years, results have shown a broadly improving trend, and this pattern of improvement was apparent in work seen during the inspection, with overall standards higher than those of recent tests and examinations.
66. By Year 9, pupils can routinely simplify algebraic expressions involving double brackets. Higher attainers factorise algebraic expressions in order to solve quadratic equations. Less competent pupils, after some initial difficulties, solve simultaneous equations, and, by Year 11, these pupils are able to use the standard formula to solve quadratic equations and begin to manipulate algebraic fractions. Higher attainers can apply various techniques to calculate probabilities. All pupils have a very good grasp of basic number work and are very adept at mental calculation. They work confidently with and manipulate algebraic expressions. The layout of work is logical and clear to read and has a high quality of presentation. Pupils of all

capabilities sometimes find recalling how to deal with complex calculations involving fractions difficult. Pupils have a positive approach to the subject and feel well supported at the personal level and by the high quality teaching.

67. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. Teachers are very much aware of these pupils' particular special needs and provide a good level of support. Gifted and talented pupils also progress well.
68. The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall. Both are better in Years 7 to 9 compared with Years 10 and 11. This is mostly because the increased attention being given to teaching and learning styles is, at present, having a more rapid impact on younger pupils. The vast majority of teaching is at least good. Lessons have a high degree of appropriate challenge and pace, to which pupils respond well. Satisfactory lessons have relatively less pace, tending not to sustain all pupils' concentration, resulting in only satisfactory learning. Homework is set regularly. It is varied in nature and both supports and extends classroom learning.
69. At present, not enough planned use is made of the library and ICT as learning resources. However, a few days prior to the inspection, the faculty took delivery of 35 laptop computers for use with the college's wireless network. It is therefore certain that the use of ICT to support learning will increase in the very near future, in line with the faculty's plans. Marking is regular, with informative and positive comments. Pupils take note of these comments. Testing is regular and involves printed in-house tests of a high quality. Pupils are aware of their standard set against national results and of their own targets; this helps their learning as they know what they need to do to improve further.
70. There are some weaknesses in the timetable. Several groups' lessons are bunched together over the course of a week. There is a comparatively limited time allocation for mathematics and the faculty feels unable to devote as much time as it would like to investigative work in mathematics. This does not appear to adversely affect coursework standards at GCSE, but it does result in a less rich curriculum for younger pupils.
71. Literacy skills are practised and developed in lessons, and, in line with the Key Stage 3 Strategy, particular consideration is given to supporting speaking skills and the use of correct mathematical language. The effect of this is obvious in pupils' confidence when talking through mathematical ideas to whole-class groups.
72. The present leadership is good. It is democratic and self-critical, with a strong awareness amongst teachers of the need and the means to improve standards. The faculty is one where all members are valued, relations are good, and all share common goals. Management of the faculty is good; it is supportive and all staff are clear about their roles. Informal day-to-day contacts help share good teaching practice. The pace of improvement since the previous inspection has been good, with improvements in teaching and pupils' attainment levels by Year 9 and Year 11.

Mathematics across the curriculum

73. Because pupils' standards in mathematics are high, they are able to use their mathematical skills very competently where they are needed in other subjects. Pupils show a very good knowledge of basic number facts and are able to use calculators appropriately and efficiently. Pupils in all year groups have the opportunity to apply some mathematical skills across the curriculum, particularly in science and geography where they use graphs and statistical information very well.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A very strong team of experienced and capable teachers work well together.
- Relations between staff and pupils are very good.
- There are very good schemes of work, and marking is consistently good with positive comments.
- Although there is very good use of performance information to set targets and to monitor progress, the limited range of teaching styles holds some pupils back from reaching the very highest levels.
- There are some very good specialist facilities, though two basic laboratories need refurbishment, and there is a shortage of working and storage space for teachers and technicians.

Commentary

74. All pupils follow a common science course in Years 7 to 9. In Years 10 and 11, they choose to study all elements of science as a double GCSE course or biology, chemistry and physics as separate GCSE subjects. Overall standards of work are well above average in science as a whole and in the separate subjects in Years 10 and 11. Taking Years 7 to 11 as a whole, achievement is good, though it is very good in Years 7 to 9. Pupils enter the college with well above average standards in science and they progress very well to achieve still higher results by Year 9. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good and GCSE results show sustained progress and achievement from Year 9 in recent years both in the separate sciences and in the double science course. Chemistry has a higher proportion of higher grades. Many pupils have accessed support revision material in physics on the extranet very successfully, and this has helped to raise their standards.
75. Present work is extensive and of high quality at all levels. Standards are rising and are now very high by Year 9, and well above average in Years 10 and 11 both for those taking the double science course and for those taking the separate sciences. There is much evidence of the development of good practical skills in all science areas, and especially in Years 7 to 9. There are very good examples of different aspects of literacy, including impressive discussions showing good listening skills and positive contributions, high quality extended writing, note taking and use of mind-maps. Similarly, the development of numeracy skills is built into the science curriculum, with pupils confidently making graphs in Years 7 to 9 from practical results and using calculations and formulae. They can estimate and measure accurately. In Years 10 and 11, complex calculations, in some cases involving extended calculations, are handled confidently and accurately. Graph work is accurate and leads to helpful conclusions about trends from practical results. Some higher-achieving pupils show they can manipulate different units in measuring pressure. Pupils with special educational needs are very well supported by teachers with extra attention and monitoring of their progress; as a result, they achieve very well. Gifted and talented pupils are challenged through directed questions at higher levels to ensure they are extending their understanding; some extension work also helps achievement. Pupils know, in all years, what their targets are, what progress they are making, and how they can improve; this good practice is an important contributory factor to their good progress.
76. Overall, teaching is good, resulting in good learning. In Years 7 to 9, they are very good because there are more opportunities for pupils to be actively involved in their learning. The very good relationships that teachers develop with pupils, good marking, very good use of data for target setting and monitoring progress, good development of extranet material, and some appropriate use of ICT material are all positive features of teaching that help pupils' learning. As a result, pupils enjoy science and find it challenging, motivating, and interesting. Their learning is also helped because the respect between teachers and pupils means that behaviour is very good, and pupils are keen to improve their knowledge, skills and understanding. Teachers support individuals well because they know their needs well and direct appropriate levels of challenge through individual attention. Many lesson plans are ambitious and are achieved very effectively taking full advantage of the good learning environment. Homework is set regularly and enhances learning. It is marked consistently well with constructive comments, grades and levels. However, teaching and learning are sometimes less effective than in the best lessons because teachers sometimes use a rather narrow range of teaching styles, which means that pupils do not always have enough opportunities to take their own learning forward by being actively involved in their responses to what is being taught. For example, there are relatively few opportunities for pupils to use their competence in ICT in their science learning because not all teachers have yet developed a wide enough range of ICT applications to enhance learning.
77. Both leadership and management of the science faculty are good. There is clear delegation of responsibilities with good collaboration between teachers. The strong and experienced team

has developed good schemes of work, integrating elements of citizenship, numeracy and literacy. There is good support for newly qualified teachers. The development plan has identified priorities to extend existing good practice. There are good discussions on how issues can be taken forward, and good development opportunities are being created through the Technology College plan. Accommodation is satisfactory with some very good specialist spaces, but some need refurbishment, and there is a need for extra specialist spaces to manage the increased numbers in popular science courses in the sixth form, as well as increased practical work in Years 7 to 9. The shortage of workspaces for staff or technicians and limited storage space are serious handicaps to the efficient working of the faculty, though technician support is very good. There are very good industry links, which promotes work related learning (WRL), and good primary links have been established with some local schools. Overall improvement since the last inspection has been good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The high quality of preparation, teaching methods and assessment means that teaching is very good.
- Excellent leadership and management are driving up the quality of learning and achievement.
- Pupils are enthusiastic about the subject, with excellent attitudes and behaviour.
- A growing bank of learning materials – meticulously recorded on CD-ROM – ensures a common framework for teaching and helps all teachers work to a common baseline.
- At present there is no specific ICT teaching in Year 11.
- ICT as a tool in learning is not yet fully embedded in the culture of the college.
- There has been outstanding improvement since the previous inspection.

Commentary

78. Standards have been rising very rapidly since the college started to put proper emphasis on ICT about two years ago. Standards are well above average by Year 9 in present work. GCSE results in recent years have been well below average, but this was from a group that had two terms of 40 minutes per week to complete a course that should have taken two years, a situation that will not be repeated. The college's strategy for the development of ICT is still being implemented, so ICT is not being taught as a separate subject in the present Year 11; however, work seen in the present Year 10 is now well above average, and the course will be taken through to Year 11 next year.
79. Achievement is good overall; it is very good in Years 7 to 9, and satisfactory in Year 10. Those with special educational needs and the gifted and talented achieve as well as others because teachers are aware of their particular needs and match their teaching to meet those needs. In lessons and in their work over time, pupils show a steady development in their ICT skills; in some cases they achieve a lot in a limited amount of time, largely owing to the enthusiasm, technical skills and teaching styles of the specialist teachers.
80. Teaching and learning are very good in Years 7 to 9 and in Year 10. The best teaching is inventive, well planned and grounded in very good task materials. In return, most pupils work very hard and successfully, and this was demonstrated in their responses to end-of-lesson recapitulations. Pupils are enthusiastic about the subject and relations between students and staff are excellent, so that strong teaching leads to very effective learning. Specialist teachers demonstrate very good, sometimes excellent, classroom skills. The use of assessment and homework is a particular strength of the department: work is regularly set, scrupulously

marked and monitored. Excellent use is made of performance information to track and guide learning, while analysis of the way individual module marks feed through to National Curriculum levels secures a valid and reliable record of attainment.

81. Excellent departmental leadership and management have created a team of teaching and support staff who are highly skilled, strongly committed to their pupils and extremely effective in driving up the quality of learning and achievement. A collective management style and mutual support are key elements of this success. The detailed level of planning of the course, schemes of work and assessment has given the department a very strong foundation on which to build a coherent approach to teaching and learning in ICT. The development of the college extranet and its use as a learning resource is a valuable asset. Staff are supported and teaching strengthened through the college's practice in monitoring and appraisal, and the planning time, available through some additional funding for staff training, is extremely well used.
82. Progress and improvement since the previous inspection have been outstanding, although the short lessons cause some hindrance to effective learning and use of time. In most of the computer rooms there is very good accommodation (although one room is inadequate) with space for group and whole class work and a layout that allows pupils to have books and folders by the terminals. Teachers make good use of smart boards and stored departmental resources. The department has benefited significantly from Technology College funding and nominates pupils for inclusion in the gifted and talented group, which means that they can access additional resources to support their learning further.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

83. Although the amount of use and the number of computers always available to subjects are still uneven, several subjects, including physical education and geography, make very effective use of ICT in learning. With pupils having well above average standards in ICT, the effectiveness of teaching and learning of ICT across the curriculum is now good. There is exceptionally good provision of ICT resources in modern foreign languages. In other areas, teachers have access to clusters of terminals as well as the computer rooms, which can be booked; there is also growing provision of whiteboard technology, with commendable levels of staff enthusiasm for its use in conveying information.
84. A generic software base is supplemented by licences for specialist applications where appropriate, and ICT teaching and support staff give their time generously in providing supervised access to the computer suites. Most departments include ICT in their schemes of work, but the use of ICT in support for learning is not yet fully embedded in all subjects, though there is particularly good use of CAD/CAM equipment in technology. The creation of a lead practitioner in each subject department is helping to develop good ICT use into the learning culture of the college, continuing the very considerable advances that have occurred in recent times.

HUMANITIES

85. Geography and history were inspected in detail and reports follow. **Latin** is taught to all pupils in Years 8 and 9 and is available as an option in Years 10 and 11. One Year 9 Latin lesson was sampled, in which teaching, learning and achievement were satisfactory. The lesson examined Roman coins as evidence of the values of Roman society to then compare them with modern British coins as part of a citizenship lesson. Pupils were able to correctly identify the different Latin inscriptions and to make reasonable assumptions about their significance; they were interested and participated well. Religious education was inspected by inspectors from the Catholic diocese of Shrewsbury and is reported separately.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average and achievement is very good in Years 7 to 9.
- Teaching is good, with examples of excellent teaching in Years 7 to 9, though learning objectives are sometimes too broad in Years 10 and 11.
- Arrangements for assessment are very good and help pupils identify ways of improving their work.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good and relationships are excellent.
- Results at GCSE in 2004 were below those usually achieved.

Commentary

86. Present standards of work in Years 7 to 9 are well above what is expected of boys nationally by Year 9, as were teachers' assessments of pupils' standards at the end of Year 9 in 2004. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are above what is usually seen at this stage and, with the exception of the most recent GCSE results in 2004, results have been well above the national average for boys. In 2004 results were in line with the national average for boys but significantly below the previous two years' results, below predicted grades and below other subjects within the college.
87. As a result of the very good teaching, the well-organised curriculum and the excellent attitudes of the pupils towards the subject, achievement in Years 7 to 9 is very good. In Years 10 and 11, geography is an option and is chosen by about two-fifths of the pupils, a proportion that is slightly higher than the national average. Achievement over the two years in relation to pupils' prior attainment is satisfactory and this is reflected in the work seen during the inspection. Poor motivation and inadequate revision led to significant underachievement in the 2004 GCSE examination and is untypical of what is usually found in the results of the college.
88. The quality of teaching is good overall and very good in Years 7 to 9 where examples of excellent practice were seen. In a Year 7 lesson, for example, pupils worked enthusiastically and achieved an excellent understanding of the concept of the water cycle because of the very clear lesson objectives, the imaginative teaching methods and the pace and challenge of the teaching. Frequently in lessons there are opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their well-developed literacy and numeracy skills as they are required to discuss their ideas, produce accurate written answers and use a range of data to construct a variety of diagrams and graphs. In a very good Year 9 lesson that explored the impact of natural hazards, pupils skilfully interpreted evidence from a selection of maps of the San Francisco area and, in small groups, formulated hypotheses and predictions based upon their knowledge of earthquakes. Occasionally, and more noticeably in Years 10 and 11, learning objectives are too broad, and lesson planning and activities do not place strong enough emphasis on enabling pupils to be actively involved in the learning. In these lessons, while the teaching remains satisfactory, it is less effective in moving pupils' learning forward.
89. As part of the assessment for GCSE, pupils complete a well-organised fieldwork enquiry, based on the patterns of land use in Birkenhead. This leads to testing theories about the processes of urban development and, from their investigation, pupils produce very good reports that make good use of statistics, digital photographs, maps and a variety of graphs and annotated diagrams.

90. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. They respond well to the high expectations of their teachers, co-operate well with each other in group work and demonstrate maturity and perseverance. In the most effective lessons, pupils are increasingly capable of taking responsibility for reviewing their work. Guided by the very good arrangements for assessment, pupils demonstrate their growing capacity to evaluate their progress and identify ways of improving their work. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported by teaching assistants and achieve well. The range and quality of resources are good and additional time provided by faculty assistants is effectively used. There are very good opportunities in all years for field work that challenge pupils to carry out investigations, gather information first hand and then present their findings using a range of techniques, including appropriate use of ICT.
91. Leadership and management are good. Teamwork is strong, relationships are excellent and planning for further improvement is based on good systems for monitoring performance. The subject development plan identifies clear actions to tackle the untypical GCSE results of 2004 and to extend further the range of teaching and learning styles. Despite the problem with the results in 2004, the department has made good progress since the last inspection.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are high and achievement good at the end of Year 9 and GCSE; it is often very good, with higher-attaining pupils achieving particularly well.
- Teaching is very good overall; the best is outstanding, with precisely defined learning objectives.
- Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning and are very productive.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Teachers' assessments of pupils' work in Year 9 have been over-generous.

Commentary

92. Present standards by Year 9 are high, though not as high as recent teacher assessments would suggest, as marking has been generous. Greater proportions than nationally reach the highest levels, reflecting the particularly good achievement of higher attainers. The achievement of all groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs and the gifted and talented, is always good and they often make rapid progress in lessons that are interesting. Pupils become very good at producing structured writing, though the skills they acquire to analyse and handle historical sources are not quite as well established across the expected range of skills.
93. The results of recent GCSE examinations were well above average, with a high proportion of pupils attaining the highest grades. In the current Years 10 and 11, standards are equally high and pupils' achievement is good. The subject is popular and more pupils than the average in most schools take the examination. Teachers plan lessons with a very good understanding of what pupils need to do to do well in examinations and course work.
94. Teaching and learning are very good throughout, with some that is outstanding. Consequently, pupils tackle difficult questions with skill and enthusiasm, and achieve well. Teachers have high expectations for pupils' learning and teach with energy and good humour. However, the range of teaching methods is sometimes narrow, which means that pupils do not always have opportunities to develop the full range of historical skills, including research

and analysis; this limits their achievement at times. Lessons proceed at a rapid pace, encouraging pupils to listen very well. Consequently, they respond to questioning very positively, showing a very good and accurate recall of subject knowledge, and work quickly on written tasks. In the outstanding lessons, learning outcomes are very precisely defined, supporting accurate assessment of progress, and the planned activities ensure that all pupils are challenged to participate; an interactive whiteboard is used very well as a teaching tool. Whilst the use of ICT to find information and extend learning is encouraged, it is not yet firmly established as part of the repertoire of teaching for every class. Marking is generally good, and at its best for GCSE pupils. However, in Years 7 to 9, pupils are less clear about the standard at which they are working and what to do to improve, as new procedures are not yet consistently applied.

95. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. There is a strong focus on raising standards further and revisions to schemes of work and assessment practice are designed to support this, especially for Years 7 to 9. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Recent improvement in results in GCSE examinations has been significant.
- The use of ICT is very effective in aiding pupils' progress.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Links with other institutions and the development of new courses enrich the curriculum.
- Some aspects of workshop practice require improvement.

Commentary

96. In tests and assessments at the end of Year 9 pupils gain above average results. These results represent good achievement from standards of attainment on entry. In work seen during the inspection, well above average standards in resistant materials were evident. An imaginative project in clock design, for example, involved cutting and shaping colourful plastic, original design and sound construction; very good behaviour and concentration established a good working atmosphere. The newly introduced course in textiles extends the curriculum and forms links with other subjects such as religious studies.
97. At the end of Year 11, pupils gain well above average results in GCSE examinations. Results in the most recent year constitute a marked advance from those in 2003; 89 per cent of pupils gained higher grades, against 64 per cent in the previous year. High quality work is taking place in all three of the technology option courses being studied for GCSE. Pupils are coping ably with demanding problems in electronics and show good research skills in product design. As in Years 7 to 9, progress in Years 10 and 11 is aided by pupils' positive attitudes. Standards in Years 10 and 11 represent continuing good achievement from attainment reached by the end of Year 9.
98. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Teaching was good in most lessons and was judged very good in some lessons. With the best teaching, work is very well planned and carefully delivered. A feature of the teaching is the very good quality of teacher – pupil relationships and the high degree of commitment by pupils and their teachers. Assessment procedures are detailed and record pupils' progress effectively, helping them to understand

the standards they have reached and what they need to do to improve. Good use is made of ICT in lessons, enabling pupils to take their learning forward themselves and undertake individual research tasks. Pupils gain valuable experience of computer-aided technology and computer-aided manufacture, both within the college and at associated institutions, such as the West Wirral Works.

99. In a few lessons, pupils used inappropriate tools, such as a centre punch for a nail sink. There was also a tendency for pupils, when unobserved, to stand near to individuals operating machinery and to engage them in conversation. Generally, however, pupils work with a due regard for safety and show due respect for tools and equipment provided.
100. Leadership and management of the department are very good, contributing significantly to rapid improvement recently, which has been good overall since the last inspection. Schemes of work are detailed and informative and strategies to raise attainment have been successful; opportunities for work related learning (WRL) are a particular strength. Standards have improved significantly since the last inspection, particularly in GCSE examinations, and staff show a unified commitment to the continuing development of the department.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good and contributes directly to the very high standards.
- Work in ceramics is excellent in Years 7 to 9 and mask-making is excellent in Years 10 and 11.
- Leadership and management are very good, bringing energy and vision to the subject.
- Pupils' very good attitudes to the subject contribute to their success.
- There is not enough provision in ICT to fully extend pupils' learning.

Commentary

101. Standards in GCSE have risen steadily over the past three years. They were well above average in 2003, with a further increase in 2004. Standards in the current Year 10 show still further increase, with all pupils on course to gain A* to C grades and many at the very highest grades. Attainment in lessons and in present work is well above average in all years. Standards in ceramics are very high in all of Years 7 to 9 and mask-making standards are very high in Years 10 and 11. The strengths here include the quality of design, surface texture and finish. In Year 7, pupils get off to a very good start to their drawing by researching, on average, 30 different techniques to achieve tone and texture. They build well on this base by careful attention to detail. In Years 10 and 11, pupils use the digital camera imaginatively to study the power of line in perspectives from the ground upwards. All work is brought to a fine finish. This represents very good achievement up to Year 9 and by GCSE, since pupils enter the school with average levels of knowledge, understanding and skills in art. Pupils make very good use of ICT for research but there is insufficient provision to manipulate images.
102. Teaching and learning are very good. The teachers have high levels of expertise from fine art to ceramics, and they impart their expertise very effectively to their pupils. They give very good demonstrations of the skills and techniques that lead to high standards. They inspire pupils with a wide range of illustrations from the works of major artists and art movements. They encourage and help pupils to be creative and imaginative and to be independent learners. They give clear guidance on how and where to research for ideas that will extend their knowledge and understanding of specific aspects such as the use of line or colour or the

impact of shape and space. All these features of the teaching enable pupils to learn very well, gaining understanding and a wide range of skills. All pupils, including those with special educational needs and the gifted and talented, get one-to-one guidance and support; this ensures they all make very good progress. The pupils have very good attitudes to the subject; these and their excellent behaviour also contribute to their success in art and design.

103. Leadership and management are very good. The new leadership has moved quickly to rectify the shortcomings identified in the last inspection report. Very good vision and energy pervade the work of the department, and the very good teamwork gives breadth to the teaching and learning. Documentation, including assessment, is thorough. Schemes of work, beautifully illustrated, are a strength of the department. Extra-curricular provision is good and supports pupils' learning effectively. There is very good technician support, which also contributes well to the smooth running of the department. The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through the study of these aspects in the work of artists and art movements. With significantly improved standards and all the other developments and improvements noted above, improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

Music

Provision in music is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Provision is very good for all pupils in Year 7 to learn to play a musical instrument.
- Weaknesses in teaching, including some which is unsatisfactory in Year 9, limit pupils' achievement.
- Not enough opportunities are provided for pupils to become involved in a meaningful way with music from non-Western and popular cultures.
- High quality extra-curricular opportunities support the learning of pupils who play orchestral and band instruments.

Commentary

104. By Year 9, pupils' knowledge of musical terms and facts is average; however, their development of musical expression and understanding are below expectations because an over-emphasis on theory and notational work has stifled their interest. Standards overall at the end of Year 9 are below average and indicate unsatisfactory achievement from Year 7 because standards on entry to the school are average. Although progress in Year 7 is sound, with good features, progress in parts of the course in Years 8 and 9 is limited by the fact that pupils have to perform using orchestral instruments on which their skill levels are elementary.
105. In Years 10 and 11, standards are above average. Results in the 2004 GCSE examination were well above national averages for the small number of pupils who took the course. Nearly all pupils who opt to take the GCSE course have an interest in music and many have instrumental skills at intermediate and higher levels. The achievement of pupils in lessons seen, and in the work sample provided, is satisfactory. More able pupils achieve well because they use computers to create individual and stylish pieces, building on their understanding of theoretical principles. Less able pupils undertake the same tasks, but the outcomes are less successful because they have not grasped some of the theoretical principles within which they are required to work.

106. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. There is some unsatisfactory teaching in Year 9. Teachers have high expectations and, as a result, attitudes are always at least satisfactory. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 receive good individual support and use computers competently to compose, although the software is not suited to the learning needs of the less able. Lessons do not focus enough on helping pupils to learn, and tasks do not cater sufficiently for differing needs; these are the main reasons why achievement is not good enough in some lessons in Years 8 and 9. Pupils are given facts and told to write them down, with little explanation or amplification. Topics which explore non-Western styles engage pupils in creating and performing in a westernised way and this fails to bring to life the cultural richness of the music being studied.
107. Leadership of music is satisfactory, and the strong extra-curricular tradition, which includes an impressive college band, provides very good enrichment opportunities for instrumentalists. Management of the department is unsatisfactory because some of the issues relating to the taught curriculum, raised at the time of the previous inspection, have not been addressed. The scheme of work provides valuable guidance for teachers, but it fails to identify what pupils will learn, and the skills on which they will be assessed. There are no planned strategies for enabling pupils of different abilities to succeed. This lack of adequate planning for learning was also reflected in the lesson plans provided during the inspection week.
108. All Year 7 pupils learn to play a musical instrument and this very good initiative leads to a large number of pupils continuing with lessons in Year 8 and beyond. However, the skills developed in Year 7 are not sufficient to enable pupils to participate adequately in the performance work that is undertaken in Years 8 and 9. Therefore, many pupils struggle to articulate their musical ideas, and the outcome is a sound that is barely tolerable. The department has good ICT provision but this is not yet being used effectively to support learning in Years 7 to 9. Overall, progress since the time of the previous inspection has been unsatisfactory.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching leads directly to very good learning.
- Standards in GCSE examinations are high.
- The very good attitudes of pupils ensure very good achievement over time.
- An excellent range of extra-curricular activities extends pupils' learning over time.
- There are some weaknesses in the details of assessment methods.

Commentary

109. Standards achieved in GCSE physical education in 2004 were high. Over half of the boys taking the examination gained grades at A* and A. This reflects a rising trend over time. Pupils enter the college with broadly average standards in physical education. By the end of Year 9 standards seen in lessons are above average, and by the end of Year 11, standards are well above average for all pupils taking the core course and high for those taking the examination course. This represents very good achievement throughout. There are no variations in the achievement of different groups of pupils.

110. In lessons, pupils demonstrate increasing control and accuracy in a range of skills. They have a good understanding of health-related fitness, and of the effects of exercise on the body. They will confidently express their views when asked. Pupils with special educational needs are supported in an unobtrusive manner, enabling them to achieve as well as other pupils. High-attaining pupils are challenged strongly, including their demonstrating to, and supporting and guiding, other pupils. With very good teaching in a Year 7 lesson, pupils learned new gymnastic skills rapidly because the teacher's very good subject knowledge and clarity of explanation ensured that all pupils had a clear picture of what they were trying to grasp. Similarly, skilled coaching by the teacher in a Year 9 rugby lesson taught pupils to execute passes at pace and to make one-on-one tackles in isolation during a game. In a Year 11 lesson, boys increased their knowledge and understanding of badminton tactics and skills of stroke execution because the teacher challenged them with ever more demanding practices.
111. The quality of learning and teaching is very good. In the best lessons, expert and well-qualified teachers have high expectations of their pupils in terms of their work rate and behaviour, and maintain a brisk pace throughout lessons. Pupils respond well to the challenges set by their teachers, and they make very strong physical and intellectual efforts to learn rapidly. Lessons are well planned and structured, with clear and shared learning objectives. Precise explanations and good demonstrations ensure that good learning takes place consistently. Observing and evaluating performance against set criteria are common in the best lessons and this lets pupils recognise and appreciate the progress they have made.
112. Many pupils achieve significant success in teams and individually, gaining local, regional and national recognition. An excellent range of extra-curricular activities, including many competitive fixtures with other schools, provides an impressive range of opportunities for pupils to extend and develop their skills.
113. Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good. They arrive promptly at lessons, are enthusiastic, and demonstrate a real enjoyment of the subject. They work hard at tasks which are well matched to their abilities and needs. Relationships between teachers and their pupils are very good. The very positive sense of fairness and the recognition and celebration of success at all levels underpin the strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural ethos of the department.
114. Leadership and management of the department are very good, bringing out the best in the teaching staff, who are all specialists and are a hard working, well organised and dedicated team, supporting each other well. Their skills are well matched to meeting the requirements of the curriculum. They have a shared commitment to continuous improvement, and they have the capacity to carry this ambition forward. They learn continuously themselves. Assessments of pupils' work are made continuously and accurately, but they still lack the detail to properly identify individual strengths and weaknesses, which was reported at the last inspection, and there is no accurate measurement made of what pupils know and can do when they enter the college. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Standards in examinations are amongst the very best in the college, accommodation has improved, the quality of teaching is better, and pupils achieve very well. The Sportsmark award for the college is an indication of the good progress that has been made.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

115. Citizenship is reported in full below. **Personal, social and health education (PSHE)** was sampled for its contribution to pupils' personal development and for its contribution in some parts of the scheme of work for citizenship. PSHE is taught by tutors and, because of this, nearly all teachers are involved. Their commitment to teaching PSHE is variable and this is reflected in the quality of teaching and learning, which ranged from satisfactory to very good. Overall, teaching and learning are good and, as a result, PSHE makes a good contribution to

pupils' personal development in a wide range of issues from bullying to work experience; the scheme of work meets all statutory requirements.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are excellent and have led to the very successful introduction and development of the subject in the curriculum.
- Arrangements for teaching the subject are very well planned and meet the needs of pupils.
- Teaching is good, with some very good and excellent features, so pupils achieve well.
- Good progress is being made in assessing and reporting pupils' work in citizenship, though more needs to be done to refine the arrangements.
- The college's strong extra-curricular activities and other opportunities enhance provision for citizenship by encouraging participation and responsible action.

Commentary

116. Standards are above average by Years 9 and 11; all groups of pupils achieve well throughout. In Years 7 to 9, pupils demonstrate good knowledge of institutions and functions of government. Their knowledge and understanding are progressively developed by returning to topics in succeeding years. In Years 10 and 11, pupils are able to discuss issues such as civil rights, approached through broader topics such as the impact of the Great War on civil rights. Most pupils are able to justify their opinions on social, political and ethical issues, both orally and in writing.
117. Teaching is good with some very good and excellent features. Because citizenship is taught within many different subjects by many different teachers, including some lessons in PSHE specifically on citizenship, there are variations in the quality of teaching. But, overall, effective learning takes place, with much that is very effective. Teachers are knowledgeable and committed and pupils respond well. In the best lessons, there is clear identification of citizenship within the lesson so that pupils are clear they are studying the subject; as a result, they are taking positive steps to become informed citizens and are developing their research skills. Less successful lessons sometimes do not make the citizenship content sufficiently explicit. As well as specific lessons, there is a very good range of opportunities to exercise practical citizenship through charity work, the college council, opportunities to take responsibility and many other things. Whilst participation in these opportunities by individual pupils varies, the vast majority benefit in some ways from what the college offers.
118. Leadership and management are excellent. Planning is very thorough, and there is a full commitment by senior managers and the co-ordinator, who see citizenship as central to the college's ethos. Impressive strategies ensure that all major elements of citizenship are covered in a range of subjects. Close checking and review ensure that what should be happening is taking place; where necessary, appropriate action is taken. Most subjects, with geography and history being particularly good examples, have very clearly identified in schemes of work and in lesson plans where citizenship is being taught. Assessment and reporting arrangements are well developed and are better than are found in most schools at present. However, there is no complacency, and there is a recognition that more needs to be done to make assessment arrangements fully secure by fully covering all elements of citizenship: there is a strong commitment to see that what still needs to be done is done. Equally impressive is the planned programme of improvement and development over the next few years; this programme recognises that not all can be achieved at once, but the plans will further enhance provision

for citizenship over a period of time. There is a clear commitment to raising standards and ensuring that the subject has a growing and positive impact on pupils' personal development.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2003, the latest year for which national comparisons are available.

AS results are only shown for students who did not proceed to take the subject at A level.

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		College	England	College	England	College	England
Biology	10	60.0	65.2	0	11.1	18	20.6
Business studies	12	75.0	76.4	8.3	16.3	23.3	26.2
Chemistry	3	66.7	72.7	0	13.9	26.7	24.1
English/English language	9	100	82.9	0	17.5	25.6	28.7
English literature	2	100	85.9	50	19.1	45	30.2
French	2	50	78.2	0	18.9	15	27.6
Design and technology	5	40	74.9	0	15.1	10	25.3
Geography	3	66.7	74.3	33.3	19.8	26.7	26.5
German	2	100	81.5	0	19.3	40	28.9
History	10	70	80.7	30	19.5	26	28.6
Information technology	13	46.2	67	0	10.9	11.5	21.4
Other social studies	10	70	69.7	30	16.7	28	24.1
Physics	3	0	68.6	0	14.4	0	22.7
Spanish	5	60	78.5	0	17.7	16	27.3
Sports/PE studies	5	80	73.2	0	11.4	22	23.1
Total	94	66	73.9	9.6	17.4	21.1	25.7
VCE Information technology	11	54.5	77.9	0	23.4	21.8	64.9

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		College	England	College	England	College	England
Art and design	5	100	98.6	20	50.2	72	87.5
Biology	21	100	96.4	52.4	39.2	92.4	78.6
Business studies	14	100	98.7	35.7	36.8	78.6	80.1
Chemistry	18	100	97.6	50	49	88.9	84.9
Classical studies	3	100	99.5	0	55.9	60	90.9
English/English language	20	100	99.4	25	36.3	76	80.9

English literature	7	100	99.5	71.4	46.5	97.1	86.5
French	4	100	98.8	25	51.5	70	87.6
Design and technology	3	100	97.8	0	35	66.7	77.9
General studies	67	91	94.7	26.9	31	71	73.1
Geography	12	100	98.7	41.7	44.5	91.7	84
German	3	100	98.4	66.7	47.9	86.7	84.8
History	15	100	99	46.7	44.6	92	84.6
Information technology	4	100	95.6	0	24.6	60	69.5
Mathematics	8	87.5	96.7	50	55.6	82.5	88.8
Other social studies	13	100	97.4	69.2	43.7	103.1	81.8
Physics	6	83.3	96.7	50	44.6	76.7	81.7
Religious studies	9	100	98.8	100	46.7	113.3	85.6
Spanish	3	100	98.3	33.3	50.2	80	86.9
Sports/PE studies	11	100	98	18.2	30.9	74.5	75.2
Total	246	96.7	97.7	39.4	42.1	81.9	81.9

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

119. The focus was on English literature and French, but English language, German and Spanish were sampled. In the two sampled **English language** lessons, teaching was good overall and students made substantial progress as they analysed connotations of language and image in cookery book covers and explored the language of traditional dialects; standards were above average. Teaching in the Year 12 **German** class that was sampled was very good, with the teacher working very hard to maintain pace, challenge and interest with the two students taking the course, whose standards were average. Standards in **Spanish** have been rising, and this was also reflected in a sampled Year 13 lesson, with three of the four students present; teaching was good, providing students with a high quality role model in Spanish and challenging them to raise their own standards, which were above average.

English literature

Provision in English literature is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching helps students to make rapid progress in lessons.
- A-level examination results are well above the national average and amongst the best in the college.
- Students' positive attitudes and hard work enable them to make very good gains on their standards when they joined the sixth form.
- Very good leadership and management help to maintain high standards of work.

Commentary

120. Standards of work in English literature are well above average. Results in GCE A-level examinations for 2003 and 2004 are well above the national average for 2003. Students generally perform better in English literature than they do in their other subjects. The present work of Year 13 students is also well above average. Based on levels of attainment when they

join the sixth form, students achieve much better standards of work than expected of them. Achievement is very good.

121. By Year 13, students have very detailed knowledge of texts. When talking about narrative elements in the poems of John Keats, they showed good understanding of literary terms and a confident grasp of the poet's techniques. As a result, discussion was rigorous and challenging so that all students learnt very well. Students are generally articulate and assured because teachers encourage them to assume responsibility for their learning so that they quickly develop confidence in their own capabilities. Thus, in a very good lesson on the poems of Carol Ann Duffy, students explored imagery enthusiastically and were very eager to talk about their findings to the class. Their analysis was penetrating and observations very perceptive, showing real scholarship. Folders and books are conscientiously maintained and show evidence of much hard work. Students plan and prepare essays carefully to give persuasive lines of argument well supported by detailed textual evidence.
122. Teaching and learning are very good. Despite cramped accommodation that makes group work more difficult, students are actively involved in most lessons. As a result, they learn very well and make rapid progress. Teachers have excellent relationships with their students so that lessons are lively and enjoyable. The enthusiasm of teachers for the subject and their dynamic approach to teaching help explain why students work so well. Conscientious and detailed marking ensures that all students know both how to improve their work and where they stand in relation to national standards.
123. Leadership and management are very good, as reflected in the consistently high levels of achievement by students. Both teaching and A-level examination results have improved since the previous inspection and overall improvement has been good. The course is very well organised so that students understand examination requirements clearly. English literature is a popular choice for sixth form students and few students drop out during the year.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

124. Students in the sixth form have above average English language and literacy skills. They have a good command of the spoken and written language and can use it flexibly in different contexts. This was apparent in all subject areas inspected.

French

Provision in French is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching is very good, enabling students to learn very well in lessons.
- Standards are above average and have been improving.
- Students' speaking skills are not as good as their reading, writing and listening skills.

Commentary

125. Standards at A level have improved over the last three years and results in 2004 were above recent national averages. This is also reflected in standards seen, although speaking skills are less good than those in reading writing and listening. For example, in a Year 13 lesson, students' achievement did not match the high quality of the very good, challenging teaching because, although the thinking and understanding were at a sophisticated level, the students lacked confidence to express themselves at this level. As a result, overall achievement is good.

126. Teaching is very good and this enables very good learning to take place in individual lessons. Teachers conduct all lessons entirely in French and provide a good range of resources. They challenge pupils to use French in discussion and writing about topics of French culture, literature and current affairs. As a result, students rapidly develop their understanding across a wide range of issues and acquire the necessary skills to take their grasp of the French language further forward. A foreign language assistant works with students to improve oral standards, and, whilst their speaking skills remain a relative weakness, these experiences are valuable for the students. The high quality of teaching motivates the students, who are committed to learning and are increasing their knowledge and skills. They find their course stimulating and are enjoying learning about France from literature and the media.
127. Many students who begin the AS-level course in Year 12 do not continue to A level in Year 13. This means that the group size in the final year is small. The effect is that students have too few regular opportunities to work with others who have similar skills and interests. As a result, their achievement over time is good rather than very good. However, they do have the chance to share activities with students from a neighbouring school and to join the Wirral work experience project in Lorient. These additional experiences are very valuable.
128. Leadership and management of the course are satisfactory. Teachers work effectively together to produce the syllabus and to allocate classes and topics to teachers. They support students in a range of activities outside the college; this is valuable in helping to raise standards. However, the responsibility for leadership is not clear enough, with several people making contributions. Although assessment is carried out frequently, there is too little assessment of speaking, the skill which is in most need of improvement. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' very good knowledge and skills help students to learn effectively.
- The positive atmosphere created in lessons and teachers' willingness to provide help and support out of lesson time encourage students to achieve well.
- Students have mature attitudes to their learning and are appreciative of the support and quality of teaching they receive.
- More use of homework and private study time to explore issues and do more routine work would free up valuable time in class for discussion and other activities.
- There is only limited use of the library to support independent learning.

Commentary

129. The post-16 mathematics course involves modules in pure mathematics and mechanics. Students in Year 12 were offered a choice of statistics or mechanics, but on a majority vote chose mechanics. The present Year 13 students are studying the former specification – the last year of its operation.
130. Achievement is good in both Years 12 and 13. The 2004 A-level results, although not yet ratified, are in line with recent national averages. Results over the last few years have always been close to or above the national average. Present standards are above those achieved nationally, indicating an improving trend set against the 2003 and 2004 examination results. Students are making good progress in the modules they are studying.
131. Students in Year 13, taking the old specification, feel that the pure mathematics modules are easier than those in mechanics, but the current Year 12 students express the reverse view.

This is probably a result of changes in the new national specifications. Students state that they are well prepared for the “change in gear” from GCSE to A-level mathematics. They are pleased with their provision and feel they are treated as adult learners, as indicated by the very small drop-out rate. Students value the fact that help is available at virtually any time outside normal mathematics lessons.

132. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers are committed and hard working. A significant strength is teachers’ subject knowledge and their creation of a mature, friendly and positive learning atmosphere in lessons. This, coupled with good student attitudes, leads to good achievement. In a few instances, work in class could have been more profitably done as private study, allowing more time in class for review and discussion. There are not enough opportunities for students to use the library to support their own independent learning. Students are assessed on a regular basis and are fully aware of what they need do to improve; they value these opportunities, which helps them in their learning.
133. Leadership of the faculty in the sixth form is good. The head of faculty is knowledgeable, is focused on raising achievement and leads by example. There is a stated intention to encourage all teachers who wish and have the necessary skills to teach post-16 mathematics. This will increase the pool of experience in the faculty and augurs well for the future. Management is good. The day-to-day running of post-16 mathematics is smooth, as illustrated by the straightforward change to the new national examination specification. Results are analysed in depth as a way of striving for improvement.
134. There has been good progress since the previous inspection. A-level results have improved. The numbers taking mathematics show an upward trend. In terms of numbers of students, mathematics is slightly above average in popularity. Attainment levels on starting post-16 mathematics are wider than those in the past, showing the faculty’s commitment to including all students who can benefit from advanced courses in mathematics.

Mathematics across the curriculum

135. Most sixth form students have well above average mathematical skills and are well able to cope with mathematical aspects of the subjects they study. In particular, the use of graphs and statistics is a strength, and students handle data well in a range of subjects across the curriculum.

SCIENCE

136. The focus was on chemistry, but biology and physics were sampled. **Biology** is a popular subject with three large groups in Year 12, with a good proportion of students progressing to A level in Year 13. Standards are above average; the students enjoy the subject and are very positive about their opportunities to achieve well. They responded very well to the good and very good teaching in the two sampled lessons. Increased numbers and continued improvement in results are features of **physics**. Standards were above average in the sampled lesson, and the very good teaching challenged students at appropriate levels to improve their understanding; they also showed good practical skills.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The teachers' very good subject knowledge is effectively used to produce an interesting course that promotes good learning and achievement.
- The excellent quality of performance information and assessment is used effectively to help students to improve.
- The students work hard and respond well to questions, but less frequently challenge teachers with their own questions.

Commentary

137. The standards at the AS-level examination in 2003 were at the national average; in 2004 they rose, with a much higher proportion of boys achieving grades A or B. The students' achievement in these years was as expected from their GCSE grades. The present Year 12 boys have made a good start to their course, reflecting good achievement. In Year 13, standards at A level were above the national average in 2003 and these standards were maintained in 2004, with nearly half of the boys gaining grades A or B. These examination results indicate that students had achieved satisfactorily from their standards at GCSE. The present Year 13 is achieving well at above average standards, with the excellent performance information and assessment helping students to focus on what they need to do to improve. There has been no significant trend in the results over the past few years. Almost all the boys who start the courses complete them.
138. The quality of teaching and learning is good with some examples of very good teaching. Strong features of the teaching include very good subject knowledge. This is effectively utilised to deliver an interesting course with well-focused questions that allow the students to develop and to share ideas. The warm relationships facilitate an environment where learning is enjoyed, with teacher and student working well together to resolve any difficulties. As a result, students are interested, they listen well and work hard. They are stimulated to think and respond well to questions; consequently, their learning is good. However, much less frequently do they challenge teachers with their own questions. Boys make good use of the Internet to expand their subject knowledge.
139. The subject is well led and managed. The curriculum is good; it is broad and taught to a depth that enables students to aspire to high grades. It is enhanced by visits to industry and universities that help to bring the subject to life. Analysis of performance information and the use of assessment are excellent; all students know what level they are at, what they should attain and what they should do to improve. ICT is utilised well both in teaching and by students in consolidating their learning; for example, they may present their multi-media presentations using whiteboards. There have been many good developments in the breadth of students' experiences and in assessment, and overall improvement since the last inspection has been good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

140. A group of students in each of Years 12 and 13 is studying the AVCE (advanced vocational certificate of education) programme. This provides well for students with either an academic or vocational focus. A number of lessons were sampled. Overall, teaching was very good; one lesson was outstanding. The teacher's exceptional professional skills and excellent relationships with the students resulted in learning and achievement of the highest order; work seen during the inspection was well above average. Students' work draws on the application of ICT in the real world, leading to very good and relevant achievement.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

141. Other than the AVCE course, no formal teaching in ICT is provided for sixth formers. However, ICT facilities are available for sixth formers to use for their research work to support their learning and for presentation of their work. Most students report that they are usually able to access computers when they need to do so, but their spontaneous use (for example in drafting and redrafting text) is hindered by the difficulty of getting access to terminals, and students complain about the slow speed and unreliability of some equipment. Students are sufficiently skilled in the use and application of computers for their needs in subjects across the curriculum, and, for example, there is good computer aided equipment in technology; this is further enhanced by students' being able to make excellent use of more advanced equipment at a centre in the borough which students visit regularly.

HUMANITIES

142. The focus of the inspection was on history. Geography, Latin, government and politics, law, philosophy and psychology are also taught and were sampled. Psychology is taught at Upton Hall School as part of the collaborative arrangements for the sixth forms in both schools and was not sampled. Theology and general religious studies were inspected separately by the Catholic Diocesan inspectors.
143. Very good subject knowledge, understanding of examination requirements and excellent relationships underpinned the good teaching and learning in the four sampled **geography** lessons. As a result, students made good progress and standards of work were above average.
144. In the sampled **Latin** lesson, the teacher's expert knowledge was used very effectively to develop students' learning; very high quality questioning made considerable demands on the students' understanding. They achieved very well, pushing themselves to translate and understand the text, with some very thoughtful and reflective points being made about the poem.
145. The sampled **government and politics** lesson was outstanding; it showed how students' active participation in debate and discussion led to learning of the highest order. The teacher achieved an excellent blend of encouragement and challenge whilst enabling the students to work creatively and collaboratively at very high standards; there was a splendid atmosphere of trust, respect and intellectual rigour.
146. Teaching and achievement were good in the sampled **law** lesson; there was a very tight focus on examination techniques when explaining the meaning of legal terms in criminal law.
147. The sampled **philosophy** lesson was satisfactory. The teacher explained some complex ideas clearly, but students' involvement was low, with only modest enthusiasm and application.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average and students achieve very well.
- Teaching is very good, and is often enthusiastic and challenging, though the range of teaching methods tends to be rather narrow.
- Students have excellent attitudes to learning and respond very well to intellectually demanding teaching.
- Leadership and management are very good.

Commentary

148. Standards in Years 12 and 13 are well above average. This reflects the improving results of both AS and A level examinations in recent years. A particularly strong feature is the very good number of A and B grades. Students achieve very well overall.
149. This very good achievement is mainly due to high quality teaching to which students respond with commitment to their studies and learn very well. Teachers convey their enthusiasm for the subject and sustain a high level of intellectual challenge in their explanations and questioning of students. Considerable emphasis is placed on ensuring that students have good, detailed notes supported by high quality handouts. Marking and guidance are good overall based on a firm understanding of examination requirements.
150. Students in Year 12 are coming to terms with the increased demands of AS-level study as this is well supported by teaching that is clear, accurate and often engaging. Consequently, students rapidly learn techniques such as note taking and how to manage their independent study. By Year 13, students can write mature, analytical essays showing an impressive factual knowledge. Their understanding of complex sources is often very good, based on a thorough grounding in background events.
151. Teaching is very good overall with a mix of approaches but mainly within a narrow range. Some lessons that are particularly engaging use a variety of learning activities. However, when teaching relies heavily on transmitting notes, learning is slow. The use of ICT for research and presenting work is encouraged but is rarely used for classroom learning. Lecture style lessons focus learning very well owing to the high quality of explanation, energy and good humour of the teacher. For example, a lesson on Lenin led to very good learning owing to the teacher's skill in explaining complex political concepts. This strongly teacher-led approach is effective in conveying argument and evidence but less so in actively engaging students in learning through discussion and debate. When such opportunities occur, such as in a very effective lesson about the appointment of Hitler, students respond strongly, participating well.
152. The sixth form courses are very well led and managed, with a determined focus on raising standards even higher. Teachers are deployed very effectively to provide specialist teaching of different modules and the team of teachers effectively collaborate for planning and assessment. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. New courses have been very well established owing to a rigorous process of evaluation of the effectiveness of teaching and students' performance, and, overall, improvement since the last inspection has been good.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- AS and A-level results have improved markedly in the most recent year.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Students show a mature and positive attitude to their work.
- Take-up in the most recent year has increased threefold.

Commentary

153. Recent results in AS and A level examinations have been well above the usual national averages. These results represent good achievement from grades gained at GCSE and are a very significant improvement on grades at AS and A levels in 2003 when results were well below average compared with results nationally for male students. The product design course taken by the students is demanding in academic terms and in terms of practical skills.
154. In present work, standards are also high, with students achieving well in both years. Students show a high level of skill in designing and making, supported by very good research skills. Individual projects show ingenuity in conception and precision in making. A standard lamp, for example, fabricated from conventional copper tube and fittings, provided evidence of original thinking and professional skill in construction. Practical work is supported by very good quality design folders. These trace the development of ideas and indicate modifications made. In a few cases, some pages in folders were crowded with script, which did not fully harmonise with layout and titling but, overall, standards of presentation are high.
155. Teaching and learning are good, with teachers demonstrating a high level of subject expertise; this, combined with their versatility, provides appropriate challenges for the students. The best teaching is encouraging students to advance their skills rapidly from their standards at GCSE. The opportunities for students to use sophisticated computer-aided design (CAD) and computer-aided manufacture (CAM) equipment at the West Wirral Works are a very good learning experience which would be beyond the college's resources to provide. The combined expertise of the college's staff and of the centre is a most positive contribution to teaching and learning in the sixth form. Positive and mature attitudes by students underlie the good quality of their learning and progress.
156. Work in the sixth form is very well led and managed, with good improvement since the last inspection. Every opportunity to extend experience is seized, for example, as mentioned above, the development of links with the West Wirral Works for the further development of skills in the use of CAD and CAM. Links with other schools have also been developed. The department holds annual exhibitions of work with another school which have led to increased interest in the take-up of sixth-form design and technology courses.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

157. The focus was on art, but music technology and media studies were sampled. Standards in the sampled **music technology** lesson were average; students made good progress because of the good resources and the good individual support they received from the two teachers and a specialist tutor. Standards were above average in both the sampled **media studies** lessons, with good or very good teaching. The teaching was confident, planning was very good and provided a range of activities that involved students well.

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are very good independent learners and research widely to support their work.
- Work is highly individual, creative and imaginative.
- Teaching is very good and engages students' interest.
- Work in three dimensions is particularly good.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- There is inadequate provision in ICT to extend students' learning.

Commentary

158. Results and numbers studying art are improving. In the A-level examination in 2003, all five students gained a pass grade, though only one gained a B grade. These numbers were too small for national comparison. However, results in 2004 were significantly above the 2003 national average both at AS and A levels. There has been a significant increase in the numbers of students studying art since 2003.
159. Present standards of work are significantly higher than those shown by the 2004 examination results, indicating rapidly improving standards in both years. The vast majority of students are working at levels that will lead to the higher grades of A and B. This represents very good achievement from their GCSE grades. All work is highly creative and imaginative and students use a wide range of materials very effectively. They think for themselves and are articulate when describing their ideas. Research and experimental work in sketchbooks is particularly impressive in the range of ideas and the quality and depth of colour studies. The quality of work in ceramics is excellent with regard to design concept and finish. ICT is well used for research but there are insufficient resources for experimenting with and manipulating images.
160. Teaching and learning are very good. The teachers have a wide range of specialist expertise, which they use to good effect to inspire their students. They give excellent guidance on how and where to research for new ideas. Students value the different perspectives of their teachers that extend their own vision. They are serious and mature and take responsibility for their own learning, encouraged and supported by their teachers.
161. Leadership and management are very good. The new leadership has been highly successful in rectifying the issues identified in the last inspection report. There is clear vision for extending work and raising standards. Assessment is very good and involves self-assessment. Students know what they have to do to improve. The technician makes a very good contribution to the efficiency of the department. Progress since the previous inspection has been very good. Standards, teaching and students' achievements have all improved, as have the accommodation and resources. The subject is well placed for even further development.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching leads directly to very good learning.
- Very good leadership and management ensure that students can achieve very well.
- Standards in lessons are well above average and the numbers of students on courses are rising rapidly.

Commentary

162. In 2004, all students who took the A-level examination passed, with a third achieving the highest two grades. This improvement on results from 2003 continues a rising trend over a number of years. The vast majority of students who start out on courses complete them successfully. Students begin sixth form study with broadly average levels of prior attainment for advanced work, and are now attaining with well above average standards in the subject. These standards are higher than recent results and represent very good achievement overall. Year 12 students are able successfully to identify the social disadvantages which deter

individuals from participating in sport, and they can link these to cultural stereotyping which still exists in present day society. In a Year 13 lesson, students examined the link between specific training for aerobic and anaerobic activity, and were able to identify the different effects this training has on energy transfer systems within individuals.

163. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Two very good lessons were seen. All teachers are experts in their subject; this expertise and their enthusiasm for the subject are successfully used in fostering students' interest and learning. Lessons are very well organised and structured, giving students opportunities to develop their skills as independent learners. The use of shared learning objectives, allied to very searching questions to probe understanding and knowledge, ensures consistency and progression in students' learning. Teachers relentlessly challenge students to work hard and produce high quality outcomes. They have consistently high expectations that students will succeed. Students meet these expectations and achieve very well.
164. Students' attitudes are good overall, and they respond well to the interesting environment created by purposeful and stimulating teaching. They pay close attention to the guidance of teachers, and work with energy and enthusiasm to explore, challenge and develop their own ideas. They are able and willing to offer cogent responses to penetrating questions which always ask "why?". All students are prepared to listen to different views and perspectives, and can modify their own opinions in the light of guidance, argument and experience.
165. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The department has a clear vision of the standards it wishes to achieve, and knows how it intends to reach these standards. Teachers communicate and moderate work in progress very well, and they have total commitment to the students and the subject. There is a clear imperative to improve on the previous best. The detailed marking of work and assessment and reporting arrangements provide accurate information on students' performance. Careful deployment of staff ensures expert coverage across all areas of the curriculum. Well-organised enrichment activities provide opportunities for both recreation and high level competitive sport.
166. There is insufficient information in the last report against which to evaluate improvement. However, numbers of students enrolled on advanced courses in physical education are increasing steadily, standards in advanced examinations are now well above average, and achievement in lessons is very good.

BUSINESS

167. The focus was on business, but one lesson of **economics** was sampled. Teaching was good with varied learning styles including a question and answer session, group work at the board and a brief note making period; as a result, students were very well motivated, made a good input into the lesson and achieved well.

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers are well qualified and have good knowledge of the subject.
- Students have very good attitudes in lessons but don't do enough outside of lessons.
- Advice and guidance are not sufficiently targeted at the needs of individual students.
- Good use is made of the extranet.
- Performance information is not used sufficiently effectively to evaluate the students' progress.
- There is insufficient challenge in some of the learning over time.

- Recent changes are beginning to raise achievement.

Commentary

168. AS and A-level results in 2003 were in line with the national averages. Achievement of these students was satisfactory because they entered the course without previous experience of the subject. In 2004 the proportion of the highest grades (A and B) at A-level decreased significantly. In present work, standards in both Years 12 and 13 are average, with satisfactory achievement. In a Year 12 class, students could effectively calculate the relationship of contribution to overheads; they were well supported by some very good teaching. Students in Year 13 make good use of technical financial terms and make thoughtful and insightful observations. Most students have good oral skills and can accurately analyse case study material.
169. Much of the teaching and learning in individual lessons is good with some very good features; this is because the teaching team has good subject knowledge and strong teaching enables students to learn effectively in lessons. However, some teaching, although satisfactory, is not challenging enough. While, overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory, learning is sometimes adversely affected because students do not do enough work outside of lessons. Some students do not read sufficiently around the subject, nor do they carry out much individual research. Many of their notes are given by the teachers without any discernable input by the students, who are mere recipients of information. Expectations of the students vary: in the best lessons, students are constantly challenged; however, in other lessons, students are expected to listen passively to the teacher's exposition for long periods. In a few lessons there is not always sufficient indication of how long the task is to take and, as a result, the pace of learning is slow. All students have very good attitudes within lessons and show considerable focus when working individually; this focus is not always fully utilised by teachers to the best effect because of the too narrow range of learning strategies followed. Marking meets the examination board's requirements and is thorough; however, the recent introduction of close marking and analysis of work is not followed by the whole team. Suggestions for improvement are generally fed back verbally, and sometimes to the whole class, rather than in a written form and some students are unclear how to improve their work.
170. Leadership and management are satisfactory, with satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. As a result of a careful analysis of the 2004 examination results, the head of department has re-organised the classes and reviewed the curriculum. These changes have begun to improve standards and students' achievement. Good use is made of the college's internal computer network to share worksheets, inform parents and students about the homework and to develop an effective revision base. Although all teachers keep individual comprehensive records, there is no departmental record of students' progress and this makes it difficult to fully monitor progress and to take notice of areas of concern.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

171. Formal provision for sixth formers' personal development occurs at the same time as for pupils in the rest of the college through a planned programme of **PSHE (personal, social and health education)**, taught by tutors to their tutor groups. Three sessions were sampled, covering both Year 12 and Year 13. Teaching was good in two sessions and very good in one. The overall programme is well planned to cover a wide range of topics, including preparation for work, problem solving activities, and university entrance. Generally, students were interested and the overall level of involvement in discussion was high, if a little restrained in one lesson. Students value the overall programme as relevant to their personal development.
172. An extensive programme of **general studies** is taught, with large numbers of entries at both AS and A levels. Results in recent years have been amongst the most successful in the

college. Overall, they have been well above average, and students tend to do better in general studies than in the other subjects they take. Only one lesson was sampled, but it demonstrated the breadth of the course and the quality of the teaching and learning. Teaching was very good in a lesson on architectural history, focusing on various building features of classical Greece around 500 BC. Teaching was pitched at a high level with a great deal of detail covered in a short time. Students' attitudes were excellent; they listened avidly to the teacher and asked intelligent questions.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the college	2	2
How inclusive the college is		2
How the college's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3	3
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the college	3	2
Overall standards achieved		2
Pupils' achievement	3	2
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities (ethos)		1
Attendance	2	2
Attitudes	1	1
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	1	2
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		2
The quality of education provided by the college		2
The quality of teaching	2	2
How well pupils learn	2	2
The quality of assessment	2	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	2	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		1
Accommodation and resources	4	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2	2
How well the college seeks and acts on pupils' views	2	2
The effectiveness of the college's links with parents		3
The quality of the college's links with the community	3	3
The college's links with other schools and colleges	3	3
The leadership and management of the college		2
The governance of the college	1	1

The leadership of the headteacher		1
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).