

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **THE WEST SOMERSET COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Bircham Road, Alcombe, Minehead,  
Somerset TA24 6AY

LEA area: Somerset

Unique reference number: 123877

Principal: Mr Nick Swann

Reporting inspector: Mr Richard Mitchell  
15947

Dates of inspection: 3 – 7 April 2000

Inspection number: 188367

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE

Type of college: Comprehensive

College category: Community

Age range of students: 13 - 18

Gender of students: Mixed

College address: Bircham Road  
Alcombe  
Minehead  
Somerset

Postcode: TA24 6AY

Telephone number: 01643 706061

Fax number: 01643 705700

Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr D Taylor

Date of previous inspection: May 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Richard Mitchell	Reporting inspector	Science	What sort of college is it?
			What should the college do to improve further?
			The college's results and achievements
			How well is the college led and managed?
Heather Danpure	Lay inspector	Equal opportunities	Students' attitudes, values and personal development
			How well does the college care for its students?
Alan Rawlings	Team inspector	Mathematics	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
Alan Brine	Team inspector	Religious education	How well does the college work in partnership with parents?
Louise Brierley	Team inspector	English	How well are students taught?
Jeff Stanfield	Team inspector	Geography	
Sue Dean	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
Neil Thompson	Team inspector	History	
Pam Craven	Team inspector	Sixth form	
Martyn Wilson	Team inspector	Information technology	
Bernard Cooper	Team inspector	Design and technology	
Cathy Hales	Team inspector	Art	
Douglas Potts	Team inspector	Music	
Tony Reynolds	Team inspector	Physical education	
Chris Lloyd	Team inspector	Special educational needs	
David Hardcastle	Team inspector	Science (support)	

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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE**

The West Somerset Community College is a large, comprehensive community college providing education for 1201 male and female students aged 13 - 18, which includes 264 in the sixth form. It has a resource base that supports the inclusion of 24 students, most of whom have moderate and more-complex learning difficulties. As a consequence, there is a higher proportion of students with statements of special educational need (SEN) than the national average. Overall, the proportion of students in need of specific help with their learning is in line with the national average. Students are drawn from a very large catchment area where there is considerable rural deprivation and very high social needs, which is not reflected by the number of students whose families claim their entitlement to free college meals. This number is broadly in line with the national average but well below the proportion who claim this entitlement in the feeder schools. The attainment of students at the end of Key Stage 2 is below the national average. On entry to the college, at the start of Year 9, reading age and NFER tests show that their level of attainment on these tests is below average. The proportion of students, for whom English is an additional language (EAL), has risen over the last three years to a level a little higher than most colleges. There is a smaller proportion of students from ethnic minority backgrounds than average.

### **HOW GOOD THE COLLEGE IS**

This is a good college, with many strengths. Students' experiences at the college ensure that their attitudes are positive and their personal development is assured. Overall, teaching is good and students achieve satisfactory standards at the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). The college is well led and managed so that it is in a strong position to improve attainment and it provides satisfactory value for money.

#### **What the college does well**

- Students are enthusiastic about college, are interested and involved in activities, and behave very well. Relationships between students and with staff are excellent.
- The leadership of the principal, senior managers and some middle managers is very good and ensures clear educational direction so that the college's aims and values are reflected throughout its work.
- There is a high proportion of good, very good and excellent teaching in Key Stage 4.
- Effectiveness of the resource base in providing for the needs of students with learning difficulties and ensuring they are fully integrated into the college is very good, as is the provision for other students with statements of SEN.
- Achievement in information technology (IT) at Key Stage 4, and in the creative arts, textiles, physical education (PE) and competitive sports is very good.
- Provision for extra-curricular activities is excellent.
- Procedures for monitoring and improving attendance, for promoting good behaviour and for personal development, in particular social and moral development, is very good.
- The effectiveness of the governing body in fulfilling its statutory duties and its increasing role in shaping the direction of the college are very good.

### What could be improved

- Planning in Year 9 is insufficiently based on attainment in subjects at the end of Year 8 and teachers are ill informed about the expectations for Year 9 students.
- Boys' attainment is weak compared to girls' attainment in many subjects.
- The attainment of students in science at all key stages is unsatisfactory.
- The use of IT across the curriculum is underdeveloped.

*The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.*

### HOW THE COLLEGE HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The college was last inspected in May 1996. Since that time, there have been improvements on several fronts. Attainment at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE has improved in line with the national trends. Whilst A-level attainment has fallen, it has improved at General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ) Advanced level. Attainment and provision for all students with SEN, especially those in the resource base, have improved considerably. Attainment in lessons shows that the college is in line to meet its targets for GCSE this year. This would be a considerable improvement on 1999. All of the issues raised by the last inspection have been, or are now being, addressed. Most effort has been put into changing the style of leadership and management so that all staff are expected to carry responsibility for improvement. Overall, improvement from the last inspection is satisfactory. The college is now in a strong position to improve attainment and there are indications that it will. The college has done well to bring about these changes in only four years.

### STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 14, 16 and 18-year-olds based on average point scores in Year 9, GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
end of Year 9 tests	C	C	C	D
GCSE examinations	C	C	C	D
A-levels/AS-levels	C	D	E	

**key**

well above average      A

above average            B

average                    C

below average            D

well below average      E

At the end of Year 9, in 1999, students in English attained above the national average and above the average of schools with a similar proportion of students taking free school meals. In mathematics and science, they attained the national average but below the average for similar schools. Over the last four years, results at the end of Key Stage 3, over all three core subjects, have improved in line with the national average. This represents improving achievement because college data shows that attainment on entry to Year 9 is falling.

Results at GCSE in 1999 were in line with the national average except for the proportion of students attaining 1A\*-G which was well below the national average. This is the result of



the wider-than-usual nature of students in this college, the attainment of students on entry in Year 9 and the numbers taking lower-level (more appropriate) qualifications instead of GCSE. Over the three years to 1999, girls were above the national averages and boys at the national average. 1999 results show that students did particularly well in art, design and technology, English, English literature, geography, history, IT and PE compared to other subjects they took. Attainment in science is a weakness at both key stages and at A-level. Work seen shows that current students in Year 11 should achieve the college's target of 48% of students attaining five or more grades A\*-C.

At A-level, the average points score in 1999 was well below the national average. Art, English, history and textiles achieve consistently good results. Advanced GNVQ courses are producing results well above the national average.

## STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the college	The vast majority of students are enthusiastic about college and show a great deal of interest in the activities in which they get involved.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Students behave very well. There is very little bullying and students take care to ensure their actions do not adversely affect others.
Personal development and relationships	Students show great respect for the feelings of others and the relationships between students and with their teachers are a strength of the college.
Attendance	Attendance rates are satisfactory. Punctuality to lessons is often unsatisfactory on this large site.

Students are very positive about the college and many get involved in activities outside the normal teaching day. The very good behaviour and the very good relationships between students and with their teachers ensure that the greater part of the teaching day has a clear focus on learning. Students show a great deal of respect for one another and help one another whenever they can. Levels of attendance are satisfactory but there is a small number of students for whom persistent non-attendance is a problem.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	Aged 13-14 years	Aged 14-16 years	Aged over 16 years
lessons seen overall	unsatisfactory	very good	good

*Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.*

Overall, the quality of teaching is good. More than nine out of every ten lessons are taught satisfactorily or better, in nearly one in five lessons, teaching is very good or excellent, but one in twelve lessons is taught unsatisfactorily. The quality of teaching in English is good, in mathematics it is very good and in science it is satisfactory. Teaching is very good in IT

and good in GNVQ subjects, in design and technology, history, art, music, drama, geography and PE. It is satisfactory in religious education (RE). There is some effective teaching of literacy and numeracy skills, but this is not consistent across all subjects. The best teaching is characterised by high expectations, very good subject knowledge and effective planning of work that challenges students appropriately. Teaching is at its weakest in Year 9 where the level of challenge is often inappropriately low because planning does not express expectations well enough.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE COLLEGE

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum provides breadth, balance and relevance for most students but planning in Year 9 is insufficiently informed by students' experience and attainment in Years 7 and 8.
Provision for students with special educational needs	All students with statements for their SEN are provided for very well. Other students with SEN receive satisfactory provision to meet their needs. The provision for students' literacy needs in Key Stage 3 is good.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	This is a strength of the college. All aspects of this provision are good, with the opportunities for students' social and moral development being very good.
How well the college cares for its students	The college cares extremely well for all of its students, ensuring that they attend and that any bad behaviour is dealt with. There is a weakness in the use of assessment information to guide curriculum planning and to monitor students' progress.

The curriculum in Year 9 meets most statutory requirements but is not well planned to meet the needs of all students. There is insufficient information about the attainment of students in subjects before they transfer to the college and too little use is made of assessment data to modify curriculum planning. The Key Stage 4 curriculum meets the range of students' needs better. The sixth-form curriculum has broadened since the last inspection but does not offer the range that meets the needs of all lower-attaining students wishing to continue their studies. Provision for students' moral and social development and for extra-curricular activities that challenge them to perform at higher levels are a particular strength. All students are cared for well and there are particularly good systems for improving attendance and promoting good behaviour.

## HOW WELL THE COLLEGE IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the principal and other key staff	The principal and other senior managers lead the college purposefully and manage its improvement well. Middle managers are being developed to improve their effectiveness and some are already effective.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body fulfils its responsibilities well. In particular, it plays an important and increasing role in shaping the direction of the college.
The college's evaluation of its performance	The college identifies its targets and its priorities for development well. Monitoring and evaluation are developing but are insufficiently focused on measuring the impact of developments on raising standards of attainment and improving quality.
The strategic use of resources	Staff, resources and accommodation are generally deployed well so that they have a positive impact on the work of the college. Inadequacies in accommodation are having a negative effect on the learning environment. Plans are in hand to address this.

The principal sets a clear educational direction for the work of the college and is ably supported in this by the senior managers. Some subject and year leaders also make a significant contribution to this, but there is less consistency at this level of middle management. The governing body plays an increasingly important role in holding the college to account for its improvement. The climate for monitoring and evaluating aspects of the college's work has been set well but there is insufficient attention being paid to ensuring that the actions that result from such evaluation have a measurable impact on standards and quality. Staffing is well matched to the needs of the college and the level of resourcing is adequate. Accommodation is having a negative impact on the work of the college. The college is well advanced in the extent to which it applies the principles of best value.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE COLLEGE

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The good progress their children make.</li> <li>• The high expectations that their children will work hard to achieve their best.</li> <li>• The ease with which they are able to raise questions or problems.</li> <li>• The help given to their children to become mature and responsible.</li> <li>• That their children like college.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities to work closer with the college.</li> <li>• The amount of homework given to their children.</li> <li>• The information they receive about how their children are getting on.</li> </ul>

The inspection team agrees with the positive views expressed by parents. In particular, they recognise the help the college gives to ensuring that students become mature and responsible. They find that the college works hard to involve parents in the college, and find that the amount of homework is adequate. They agree that the reporting of progress to parents could be sharper in sharing with parents what their children should do to improve.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

#### **The college's results and achievements**

- 1 In the tests at the end of Key Stage 3, in 1999, students in English attained above the national average and above the average of schools which have a similar proportion of students claiming their entitlement to free college meals. In mathematics and science, they attained at the national average and below that in similar schools. Over the last four years, results at the end of Key Stage 3, over all three core subjects, have improved in line with the national average but remain below those for similar colleges. This represents improving achievement because the college's measurements of reading age and cognitive attainment on entry to Year 9 show that the ability of the intake is falling.
- 2 The work in Year 9 lessons is around the national average in English, art, design and technology, geography, history, information technology (IT), music and physical education (PE), where the work is suitably challenging. In two of these subjects (design and technology and PE), the liaison with the middle schools is at its best and the transfer of information at the end of Year 8 enables these subjects to plan to move students on. In mathematics, science, modern foreign languages and religious education (RE) the standards seen are below the national average, mainly because they have little information about attainment at the end of Year 8 upon which they could build. While students make good gains in knowledge, understanding and skills in English and music, these gains are satisfactory in most other subjects, but unsatisfactory in modern foreign languages and RE. Students in the resource base make very good progress, and the progress of special educational needs (SEN) students overall is good.
- 3 At General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), in 1999, the percentage of students attaining 5+A\*-C, 5+A\*-G and their average points score were all in line with national averages. The average points score was below that in similar schools. The percentage of students attaining 1A\*-G was well below the national average. This is partly because the college has more students than most schools for whom GCSE is an inappropriate qualification. Over the three years to 1999, girls were above the national average and boys at the national average. Boys enter the college with reading and cognitive test scores below those of girls. The college is aware of this and is addressing this issue well so that there is less difference in the attainment of boys and girls in lessons than shown in results.
- 4 1999 results show that students did particularly well in art, design and technology, English, English literature, geography, history, IT and PE compared to other subjects they took. Science attainment is a weakness at both key stages and at A-level. The college is aware of this weakness and a recent internal evaluation of the science department has resulted in an action plan being drawn up to address this.
- 5 The work in lessons shows that the current students in Year 11 are achieving above the national average in English, science, art, design and technology, geography, IT and PE, and around the national average in mathematics, history, modern foreign languages, music and RE. This suggests that this year's results will exceed those in 1999. These levels show that students are achieving well in all of their subjects,

given their lower levels of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3, because the teaching in Key Stage 4 challenges them at a more appropriate level. This is because, at the start of Year 10, subjects have the information they need to set students and pitch work more accurately. Students with statements of SEN are achieving particularly well because of the high quality of the support they are given.

- 6 At A-level, the average points score in 1999 was well below the national average. Art, English, history and textiles achieve consistently good results. Advanced General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ) courses are producing results well above the national average. In lessons, students are achieving above the standards expected for their courses in English, art, PE and RE. They achieve around the level expected in all other subjects except for science where, for example, the range of GCSE attainment of students taught in groups adversely affects the level of challenge and pace of learning. Given their levels of attainment at the end of Key Stage 4, students achieve well in English, art, geography, music, PE and RE. Achievement is satisfactory in all of their other subjects.
- 7 Sustained and expressive writing of good quality is seen at higher levels of ability and, at times, this is excellent, particularly at Key Stage 4 and A-level. In Year 9, there is a variation in the standard of written work seen with low standards of technical accuracy, particularly amongst lower sets. Although there is some variation, overall standards in spelling are satisfactory and this is an improvement since the last inspection. Teachers use key words, which are prominently displayed in all classrooms, and word banks to support students' written work.
- 8 The additional literacy lessons, provided for students who enter the college with significantly lower levels of literacy, are well planned and matched to the needs of students. Gains in confidence and improved levels of literacy among these students, who are predominantly boys, are notable.
- 9 The contribution of subjects other than mathematics to students' competence in numeracy is limited. The GNVQ business module on finance makes appropriate use of number in the work on break-even and cash flow. Geography supports numeracy very well for all students, such as in Year 9 work on water use in the home and with the climatic graphs linked to the module on Kenya. Year 11 coursework also shows a range of data collection and analysis methods. Opportunities to reinforce numeracy are missed in many other subjects and the absence of any significant contribution from science is a particular weakness.

### **Students' attitudes, values and personal development**

- 10 Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good and are a strength of the college. Most students are enthusiastic about their work, keen to learn and enjoy being at the college. This creates a very positive and pleasant working atmosphere.
- 11 Behaviour around the college and in most lessons remains very good. Students listen well, willingly answer questions and participate fully in the activities provided. Attitudes to learning are generally good and improve as students move up through the college. There is, however, unsatisfactory behaviour in some Year 9 lessons when students do not always respond well to the teacher, find it hard to concentrate, quickly become restless and make slow progress with their work. Sometimes this occurs where the work given and methods of teaching are inappropriate.

- 12 The high number of fixed-term exclusions has increased significantly since the last inspection. This reflects an increase in the number of challenging students in the college and the tough line the college takes to minimise disruption. However, the low number of permanent exclusions, which has decreased since the last inspection, indicates that students are responding positively to the strategies that the college has in place to deal with unacceptable behaviour. Students are confident that any incidents of bullying, which they report, are dealt with promptly and effectively.
- 13 Relationships in the college are excellent. Students relate very well to each other and to teachers and other staff. The college is a very effective and mutually supportive community. Students are good at collaborating and co-operating in lessons when opportunities are provided. They also show respect for each other and the diverse views they express. Students respond very well to their teachers who, in turn, use praise effectively and clearly have high expectations of their students' work and behaviour. Trust between students and staff is very strong and results in students gaining confidence and developing into mature and responsible individuals.
- 14 Students respond very well to the many opportunities provided to help others, such as in supporting charities. They also willingly take on positions of responsibility, for example on the year and college council. They are also very keen to participate in the excellent range of extra-curricular activities provided. Students are also good at taking initiative when opportunities are provided but these are limited in some lessons.
- 15 Attendance is satisfactory and the rate of unauthorised absence is similar to the national average. This is remarkable, given a number of difficult circumstances. The college has a very large catchment area and some students have a long and difficult journey each day. Bad weather also has a more significant effect on attendance than in many places. For example, roads closed by snow during the inspection prevented some students attending. Despite this, 39% students in Years 9 to 11 have an attendance record above 95%, which is very good.
- 16 Attendance in Year 11 last year was still below 90% due to a large number of persistent absentees. There are far fewer students with attendance problems in the current Year 11. Absence due to holidays in term time is also a concern.
- 17 Students are often late arriving at lessons especially when there is no time allowed for movement. This reduces the time available for teaching. This is partly a result of students having to move frequently during the seven-period day and the spread-out site with many different buildings.

#### **HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?**

- 18 The quality of teaching, in two out of every three lessons, is good or better. The proportion of teaching that is very good or excellent is now 19%, and this represents a considerable improvement since the last inspection when this figure was 11% and, overall, teaching was judged to be very good. The proportion of unsatisfactory teaching has increased from 5% to 8% since the last inspection. There is still no poor or very poor teaching and, overall, the quality of teaching is now good.

- 19 At Key Stage 4, three out of every four lessons are taught well, including a quarter very well which is very good. In the sixth form, teaching is good overall with nearly three quarters of lessons taught well and one lesson in eight taught very well, with a very small proportion of unsatisfactory teaching.
- 20 The most effective teaching, found in mathematics, art, IT, textiles and PE, is characterised by very good subject knowledge together with an enthusiasm for the subject and high expectations that incite a high level of student involvement both in the subject and in learning. There is also much effective teaching in English, history, geography and music where students are challenged at an appropriate level.
- 21 Most teachers use their expertise to challenge students to think through good use of questioning and a clear focus on what should be learned. Relationships in these lessons are excellent. They are conducted with liveliness and flair and students are inspired to produce excellent work. Teaching methodologies are evaluated with students in the best lessons, so that they are able to assess for themselves the impact the lesson has on their own learning. Effective planning and a pace that is brisk and productive are also apparent in good lessons. These qualities are particularly noticeable, overall, at Key Stage 4 and characterise good teaching in English, mathematics, geography, German, PE, history, drama and music. The detailed marking of students' work, which gives explicit and clear guidance on the steps to be taken to improve work linked to targets, makes an important contribution to good teaching in geography, English and GNVQ in the sixth form. In IT and history, good questioning by the teacher supports the development of students' understanding.
- 22 In Year 9, one in five lessons is taught unsatisfactorily, although one in seven lessons is taught very well. The least effective teaching in Year 9 is characterised by a lack of challenge for students, especially higher attainers. This inappropriately low level of challenge is, in many subjects, the result of ineffective curriculum planning which does not provide teachers with enough information about the level at which to pitch work. This leads to time being used unproductively, with students engaged in low-level tasks that are undemanding. Learning objectives are not always established effectively with students or they are described to students in terms of task completion rather than intended learning outcomes. Some teachers are too tolerant of poor behaviour and unable to impose discipline so that, for example, question and answer sessions are poorly managed. There is also a weakness in the teaching of RE by non-specialists in Year 9.
- 23 The college has developed strategies for the teaching of literacy across subjects and the positive impact of this work can be seen in art, English, mathematics, geography and history. In these subjects, word banks and key words support the development of students' skills in reading and writing and activities which exploit the opportunity to develop skills in speaking and listening are well planned and organised.
- 24 The teaching of numeracy skills is underdeveloped across the curriculum. While this aspect of work is taught well in mathematics, geography and the farm unit, insufficient emphasis is placed on it in other subjects, notably science. Although students use IT well to investigate number in IT, there is little use of this in other subjects.

- 25 Students within the resource base are taught well. The teaching of SEN students is well supported by individual teaching strategies, which are highlighted in Individual Education Plans (IEPs), and by experienced learning support assistants (LSAs). The additional literacy teaching, provided for students who enter the college with low literacy skills, is well planned and matched to students' needs.
- 26 Learning is good overall but particularly strong in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Students are well motivated and show a good level of independence in their work. In music, they can evaluate their own performances; in mathematics they have the knowledge to debate different methods to solve problems; in geography they have the confidence to carry out their own research. The stimulus of the technology and good teaching in IT lessons give all students the motivation to succeed and lower-attaining pupils, in particular, sustain their interest and achieve well. The fact that there is so much good and very good teaching at Key Stage 4 is a major contributory factor to the quality of response from students.
- 27 By contrast, students in Year 9 make less overall progress than when they reach Key Stage 4. In lessons where learning is unsatisfactory, the main weaknesses are the slow pace at which students acquire skills and knowledge, the relative lack of interest they show in their work and their inability to make links with earlier learning. The impact of this mismatch, with what is needed, results in some students slipping off task and, at times, causing difficulties in lessons.

#### **HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO STUDENTS?**

- 28 The college aims to provide an 'inclusive' education for all learners within the community and has successfully planned its curriculum and overall provision to meet a wider range of needs than would otherwise be the case in a typical comprehensive college. There is good liaison with middle schools to ensure that those with learning difficulties are identified early. The targeted individual help provided through specialist support in the Additional Education Unit, and also literacy lessons for some classes in Year 9, are both good. Provision across the college for students with SEN is good overall and the college makes real efforts to ensure curriculum access, even for the most physically disabled student. At present, support for numeracy across the curriculum is unsatisfactory due largely to limited contributions from key subjects, in particular science.
- 29 All students follow a broad curriculum in Year 9, including separate lessons in drama and IT. The limited time for RE, which was criticised as insufficient in the last inspection, has now been increased although the number of non-specialists teaching the subject has an adverse effect on the quality of this provision. Because the curriculum at Key Stage 3 is shared between the middle schools and college, much time has been spent deciding how the content of the programmes of study should be organised. In music, learning builds well on the Year 8 experience. Overall, however, there are a number of weaknesses in Year 9 curriculum planning which put teachers at a disadvantage as they try to build on Years 7 and 8. While there is information available about what students should have experienced, there is insufficient detail about what they have learned and can do. As a result, the curriculum does not build on students' previous learning and lesson planning is adversely affected. Many subjects, including mathematics and science have not built the use of IT into their work schemes. In mathematics, the scheme itself is poor, although this is now being remedied.



- 30 The curriculum at Key Stage 4 offers a full range of GCSE courses alongside certificates of achievement, IT certificates and participation of some students in the Youth Award Scheme. Overall, the provision is well matched to need and the college continues to develop courses, such as the expansion of work-related learning opportunities for identified students, scheduled for the autumn of 2000. A wide and expanding range of A-level courses are on offer in the sixth form. GNVQ courses at Intermediate and Advanced level provide an alternative route for those for whom a more vocational route is suitable. However, the absence of any GNVQ studies at foundation level or in Key Stage 4 means that the present arrangements are not wholly appropriate for all those that choose this option.
- 31 There is an appropriate programme of personal and social education (PSE) with well-planned 'focus' days on themes linked to the RE programme. Careers education in Year 9 is given insufficient time currently but a better-planned arrangement is to be introduced in the autumn. The college is unable to provide a work experience placement for all students in Year 10 because of local difficulties in finding enough providers. However, students who are involved benefit from good guidance, including a work-experience diary. An industry day, linked to the scheme, gives a good opportunity for all students to find out more about work and sixth-form opportunities. Guidance on post-18 opportunities is good and covers further education, employment and a 'gap' year. Appropriate use is made of the UCAS web-site to support higher-education course choice.
- 32 The range of extra-curricular activities at the college is excellent and there are good participation rates. Full use is made of the hour-long lunch break to offer a good number of sports and other activities. The college is represented in sport at county and national level. Extra-curricular music, through concerts and other performances, is good and there are links into the community with outreach work. A recent successful bid for funds to support Out-of-School-Hours Learning will enhance further the college's already strong links with the local community and other education providers.
- 33 Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. Opportunities for students' moral and social development are a particular strength of the college. The ethos is very positive and the commitment to the values of respect, integrity and inclusion is reflected throughout life of the college. The pattern of assemblies provides a particularly strong context in which the values are expressed, reinforced and celebrated.
- 34 The contribution to students' spiritual development is good. There is some particularly strong provision in assemblies, art and RE where students are encouraged to reflect on deeper aspects of human experience and have good opportunities to express their feelings and thoughts. In art, students are actively encouraged to reflect on their sensory experiences and express their sense of wonder. There are some good examples of students discussing more profound ideas in mathematics and IT lessons. Elsewhere, the opportunities are more restricted and the college has yet to develop a consistent understanding of the contributions that can be made to spiritual development by all areas of the curriculum.

- 35 The opportunities to enrich students' moral development are very strong. The overall emphasis on providing a secure and consistent framework of expectations about behaviour and values ensures students develop a clear understanding of right and wrong. There are some very good opportunities for students to think through ethical issues in the programme of philosophical and religious education. The PSE programme also reinforces the importance of exploring moral values. Other subjects, including history, geography, drama, law and IT, take advantage of opportunities to examine moral themes. For example, in geography, students explore the moral dimension of issues related to environmental damage.
- 36 The provision for students' social development is also very good. The college places a high emphasis on a sense of personal responsibility and the development of independence and initiative. The opportunities provided through the extra-curricular programme and features such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, College Council and charitable activity are very positive. There are good opportunities to explore social issues in RE, PSE, IT, geography, history and English. For example, in IT, students investigate the social implications of the Internet very effectively. There are very good examples of students developing their social skills in a range of subjects such as drama. The role model of exercising responsibility provided by older students, particularly those in the sixth form, has a very positive effect on the development of younger students.
- 37 The contribution to students' cultural development is good. The provision of a strong extra-curricular programme reflects the good practice. There is a particularly strong provision in the areas of sport and the creative arts. There is a clear commitment in the college to extending the students' range of cultural experiences with some good enrichment activities such as the residential activity in geography, gallery visits in art and the Jazz Band tour of Brittany. Also of note, are the good links with France and Germany for students studying modern foreign languages. The provision of activity to extend students' intercultural experience is less well developed.

#### **HOW WELL DOES THE COLLEGE CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?**

- 38 The provision made to promote students' wellbeing is a strength of the college, although there are weaknesses in the area of assessment. The arrangements to secure students' welfare, health and safety and to promote good attendance and positive behaviour are very effective. The college is also effective in monitoring and supporting students' academic and personal development. The weakness relates to some aspects of the arrangements for assessing students' attainment and progress, and the ways in which the college uses assessment information to ensure that the curriculum and teaching match students' needs and capabilities.
- 39 The college has exemplary arrangements for child protection and health and safety. All procedures are in place and comply with the appropriate regulations. The college's policy on 'Coping with Crises' has been adopted as a model by the Local Education Area (LEA). The college matron and part-time college counsellor make strong contributions enriching the provision supporting students' welfare and safety. Students with SEN, particularly those with the most severe needs, receive excellent care and support from appropriately trained staff.
- 40 The procedures for monitoring and supporting attendance are very good. This is an area in which the college works very hard and achieves success. There are no longer any concerns about completing registers. Good records are kept of students'

attendance and good procedures are in place to follow up absences. The college initiative involving local first and middle schools (TRAC) where there is joint monitoring of students with attendance problems, with effective support from the Educational Welfare Service, is particularly helpful.

- 41 The provision of the Flexible Learning Centre is proving very effective in reducing the unauthorised absence of disaffected and disturbed students. It is also effective in reducing exclusions and in helping students with significant behavioural problems to remain in college. This is a particularly positive expression of the college's commitment to inclusion.
- 42 The college has very effective procedures for promoting positive behaviour. The existing arrangements have recently been thoroughly reviewed in the process of developing a new behaviour management policy. There are good systems for tracking poor behaviour, supporting students who are experiencing problems and rewarding and celebrating success. These are effective in ensuring that behaviour around the college site is very good. Students, who are on the SEN register because of behaviour problems, are very well supported through good liaison between specialist and pastoral staff. The procedures for monitoring and eliminating oppressive behaviour and bullying are very effective. The college regularly involves students in a review of bullying to ensure that its arrangements remain effective.
- 43 The arrangements for assessing students' academic progress are satisfactory overall. At Key Stage 4, and in the sixth form, assessment arrangements are satisfactory where the structure of the examination requirements ensures that assessment is accurate and reliable. The procedures for assessing and monitoring students' academic performance in Year 9 are unsatisfactory and, in some areas, poor. Very limited information about students' attainment in national curriculum terms is received from the feeder schools. As a result, the college's knowledge about attainment in subjects on entry is very insecure. Students are placed in groups according to their results in reading tests, cognitive tests, school recommendations and subject tests in the college. This has the effect of placing some students into groups in which the level of challenge of the subject is inappropriately low. The problem is compounded because the understanding in many subject areas of the use of levels is often very weak and few subjects have effective portfolios of work to exemplify standards. As a result, many subjects, including science, modern foreign languages, history and RE, do not have effective strategies for securing accurate or consistent judgements about attainment which would support students' progress towards targets.
- 44 The college does monitor assessment data after each set of examinations and identifies weaknesses. It then takes the necessary remedial action to address these weaknesses.
- 45 The use made of assessment data within subjects to review the curriculum and teaching to match students' needs and capabilities is unsatisfactory. This has a particularly detrimental impact in Year 9 where, in many subject areas, the match between the work set and the students' previous attainment is often inappropriate.
- 46 The arrangements for monitoring and supporting students' academic progress are good, despite weaknesses in the assessment procedures. The system of one-to-one reviews with students plays an active role in evaluating their strengths and weaknesses and the setting of targets is impressive and imaginative. The

procedures in the sixth form were reviewed this year and now incorporate some good features of self-assessment and target-setting. The monitoring of the academic progress of students on the SEN register is very intensive and effective.

- 47 The procedures for monitoring and reviewing students' personal development are good. In the case of students with SEN, the arrangements for co-ordinating the different agencies and for using external professionals are very effective in ensuring students' progress is monitored and supported appropriately. Tutors know their students well and the tutorial periods are generally used effectively to build positive relationships. The record of achievement is used appropriately and the system of rewards recognises and celebrates a wide range of personal successes. The annual report includes an opportunity for students to reflect on their achievements beyond their academic work.

### **HOW WELL DOES THE COLLEGE WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?**

- 48 The parents, who responded to the inspection questionnaire and met inspectors before or during the inspection, are positive about the college and what it provides for their children. However, the number of parents who expressed their views was low and may not reflect the views of all parents.
- 49 Parents think their children are expected to work hard, achieve their best and make good progress in the college. They also think that teaching is good in most subjects, feel comfortable about approaching the college and appreciate the prompt response they receive to their questions and concerns. They are also very positive about the care that their children receive and opportunities for sporting activities.
- 50 Parents raised concerns about the standards in science, inconsistencies in the quantity and quality of homework set, the checking of student planners and information about how their child is getting on.
- 51 Although the inspectors agree with most of the views expressed by parents, they do not agree with the view that the college does not work closely with parents. The college is very keen to work with parents, listen to their views and contact them if they have any concerns. In particular, links with parents of students with SEN, which was criticised at the last inspection, has improved significantly and is now good. The college has responded to a request from parents to keep them better informed and, as a result, a working party of parents and staff has been set up to discuss their roles in supporting learning. The college is aware that parents do not always receive all the letters they send home with students and has plans to address this. Students' planners are under-used as a method of communication. Some information is now available on the college's Internet web page. There are also plans to extend the number of meetings in community venues to enable more parents to attend.
- 52 The college provides a good range of helpful and informative documents for parents, particularly the home-college agreement, prospectus, governors' annual report, the newsletters and the welcome booklet for new students, their parents and carers. There is also useful information about choice of GCSE courses in the booklet for Year 10 and 11. The prospectus, reports for students not taking a GCSE in IT and the end-of-Year 9 report on results in national tests do not meet all legal requirements.

- 53 Inspectors agree with some parents that the information they receive about how their child is getting on could be better. Students' reports were criticised at the last inspection for not providing information about how students can improve. A section is now provided for this information but the comments they contain are frequently too general and do not indicate what a student needs to do to improve their knowledge and understanding in that specific subject. A similar criticism also applies to some teachers' comments about students' progress.
- 54 Parents, particularly in Year 9, also receive very little information about what their child will study or has studied. This restricts the contribution that some parents can make to supporting their children's learning. There are plans to provide this information in the autumn. Parents' attendance at parents' meetings is generally good. The college has an active parent and teachers association that organises fund-raising activities, such as the beacon to beach run, and help at college events. Parents are closely involved in the review of SEN statements and the college makes real efforts to share Individual Education Plans (IEPs) with parents; where necessary, arranging such reviewing in off-site venues.

#### **HOW WELL IS THE COLLEGE LED AND MANAGED?**

- 55 The principal sets a clear educational direction for the work of the college and is ably supported in this by the senior managers. It is this clarity that has resulted in the college coping successfully with its increasing roll and in widening its provision so that it better meets the needs of the community in which it sits. Many subject and year leaders also make a significant contribution to this, but there is less consistency in leadership and management by staff in these positions.
- 56 The governing body plays an increasingly important role in holding the college to account for its improvement. It recognises and supports the improvements the college has made since the last inspection but is also aware that the college, having set a firm foundation, now needs to address attainment in those areas where there is underachievement.
- 57 The climate for monitoring and evaluating aspects of the college's work has been set well. Monitoring within subjects is underway, such as the college focus on the quality of display. This has resulted in improvement in the learning environment but the effects of this on learning have not been measured. Line management of subjects by senior managers is ensuring that monitoring is taking place, results are being analysed and actions are being planned. However, there is insufficient attention being paid to ensuring that these actions have a measurable impact on standards and quality.
- 58 The college has well-qualified staff able to deliver almost the whole curriculum effectively though the use of non-specialist teaching staff adversely affects the quality of the curriculum in RE in Year 9. Staff work well together within teams. The work of such teams is regularly monitored and reviewed and staff have the opportunity to contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of their work. Non-teaching staff make a significant contribution to students' education, both through their work with students and by enabling teaching staff to work more effectively. Staff development is well led and managed within a clear well-understood framework. As a result, for example, the qualifications of staff who work in the additional education unit are well matched to the wide range of SEN of students in the college.

- 59 College accommodation is clean and well maintained and is enhanced by good displays that support students' learning or illustrate college activities. Despite these efforts, continuing inadequacies in the accommodation make this an environment that, in many places, is not stimulating. Student numbers have increased faster than the available accommodation. The number of huts in use has increased from an already high number. These offer a limited learning environment. When the weather is poor, it is difficult to move around the site without becoming wet and muddy. In a number of subjects, such as science, IT, music and design and technology, the poor accommodation restricts the opportunities and experiences that are offered to students, and their education suffers as a result.
- 60 Learning resources are well managed and presented. For example, the learning-resource area provides a range of appropriate, modern resources that effectively support better learning. However, the range and quality of resources overall is only adequate.
- 61 The college manages its finances carefully and is currently operating a tight budget with limited additional resources at its disposal and virtually no reserve funds. Short-term financial planning is good but there is no medium-term financial plan that maps likely income against indicators, such as student numbers, staffing projections and anticipated major expenditure. Nevertheless, the college is active in securing additional funding to support its aims and is knowledgeable about the different funding streams that are available. The recent success with a three-year bid for Out-of-School-Hours Learning will further the college's community status and is consistent with the governing body and principal's aspirations for the college.
- 62 There is a good understanding of how the college should apply the principles of best value to all that it does. Recent savings have been achieved through the college taking over responsibility for its own ground maintenance. It is aware of the need to test more rigorously the overall curriculum provision against these principles. This is especially necessary as, at present, staffing for the Year 9 curriculum is more generous than the delegated budget yet this is where practice is least strong.

## WHAT SHOULD THE COLLEGE DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

In order to address the weaknesses in provision and to ensure continued improvement, the governors and senior managers should:

- Ensure that subjects have more information about the attainment of students in all subjects on entry to the college (*paragraphs: 2, 43, 88, 152*) at the start of Year 9, and use this information to:
  - plan the curriculum for each subject so that it will inform teachers how best to ensure that students make the progress they should to achieve or exceed their targets. (*paragraphs: 29, 38, 43, 45, 81, 88, 95, 125, 152, 159, 171*)
  - raise the expectations that teachers have of students so that the quality of teaching consistently matches the best practice in the college. (*paragraphs: 22, 71, 80, 92, 104, 111, 133, 146, 152*)
  - keep students and their parents better informed about what they need to do to improve their work in each subject so that the quality of learning is more consistently good. (*paragraphs: 27, 53, 92, 104, 151, 152*)
- Continue to ensure that the range of teaching methods used and the expectations set challenge all students so that they achieve their potential, in particular focussing on improving boys' attainment. (*paragraphs: 3, 74, 90, 143*)
- Improve teachers' understanding of the demands of levels and grades in science, so that students are challenged appropriately to offer their own explanations and to evaluate the findings of investigative work so that attainment at the end of Year 9, in GCSE and at A-level, will improve. (*paragraphs: 2, 4, 6, 89 – 95*)
- Increase the use of IT in all subjects so that the requirements of the National Curriculum are met and students' learning experiences are broadened. (*paragraphs: 88, 97, 134, 115, 137*)

As well as addressing the key issues described above, the governors and senior managers should consider how they will address the other issues of:

- Ensuring that, with the LEA, they continue to tackle the inadequacies of the accommodation so that the environment becomes more conducive to learning in all parts of the college. (*paragraphs: 59, 67, 81, 98, 106, 157*)
- Continuing to develop the focus on the teaching of numeracy skills across all subjects of the curriculum so that students of all levels of attainment become more competent in this area and are thus enabled to access higher levels of understanding in all subjects. (*paragraphs: 9, 24, 28*)
- Reducing the negative impact of non-specialist teaching in RE. (*paragraphs: 22, 170*)
- Sharpening the monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching and learning by ensuring that whatever the focus for subsequent action, success is always defined in terms of measurable impact on standards of attainment and quality of teaching and learning. (*paragraphs: 57, 81, 96, 116*)

## THE WORK OF THE SEN UNIT

- 63 The special unit is funded by the local authority for 24 students with statements for SEN, identifying moderate learning difficulties. At the time of the inspection, it was providing for 21 of the 35 students with statements in the college, and for 8 other SEN students on a full time and 14 students on a part-time basis. Many of the students with statements for moderate learning difficulties have additional SEN identified, including emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- 64 The unit is very efficiently managed by the Head of Learning Support and the college makes very good inclusive provision for the students who are placed in it. The unit provision is a strength of the college. This is characterised by the students' membership of mixed-ability tutor groups in which they are fully accepted, a broad and challenging curriculum taught by well-informed subject specialists, and good access to the wide range of extra-curricular activities. These contribute to the very good progress which special-unit students make in their knowledge and skills, and to their very good social development. Special-unit students are predominantly placed in bottom sets, and these follow the well-developed departmental schemes of work, with modifications where necessary. All unit students have access to the additional literacy curriculum. The success of this provision is illustrated, for example by: students in a Year 9 bottom set for English retaining good knowledge of figures of speech from lesson to lesson, and beginning to use these well in their descriptive writing on monsters; Year 10 students extending their grammatical knowledge of suffixes through careful choice of exercises in their individual programmes.
- 65 One means by which the college makes such good inclusive provision for this group is by effective documentation and tracking of students' progress in lessons, and through well-targeted support. Students' annual reviews are well managed and there is good parental attendance. IEPs contain useful strategies that assist teachers in adapting their approaches and this information is supplemented by clear pen-pictures of individual students' needs. The Learning Support Assistants (LSAs), who support unit students, are skilled, know the students well and have excellent relationships with them. Targets in IEPs do not identify sufficiently closely the next steps in students' learning and, as a result, are not as useful as they might be in informing teachers' planning. However, the quality of multi-sensory experiences offered, often using pictures, videos, diagrams and direct experience in the best lessons, and the high expectations of teachers, ensure very good progress.
- 66 The unit students benefit strongly from the atmosphere of mutual respect, which all students hold for each other in the college, and play a full and active part in the college's life. They are enthusiastic learners and evidence from their books shows that they work hard and develop skills both in organising and presenting their work.
- 67 Although the teaching accommodation for unit students is often poor, staff make a great effort to ensure that any negative effects are minimised

## THE SIXTH FORM

- 68 The college offers a broad range of options in the sixth form. As well as A-level, the college offers Business and Health & Social Care General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ) at Advanced and Intermediate level as well as Land and Environment at Intermediate level. Since the last inspection, entry-level courses and NVQ administration and care qualifications have been introduced. Whilst this broad



range of courses meets the needs of the majority of students progressing into the sixth form, there is no provision from Key Stage 4 for students better suited to foundation-level courses. So, for a significant minority of students, the Intermediate level courses do not fully meet their needs.

- 69 The attainment of students taking one A-level qualification, is well above national averages. For students taking more than one A-level qualification, attainment is below average. The college has analysed the potential of current A-level students based on their GCSE grades and predicts results at least in line with, if not above, national averages this year. This is borne out with higher attainment seen in a significant majority of lessons with the exception of some lessons in geography and the sciences.
- 70 Attainment in GNVQ advanced courses is well above the national average and, at Intermediate level, is in line with the national average. Students who do not obtain the full award do obtain units. Already, a large proportion of advanced students have achieved a distinction grade whilst a higher proportion of intermediate students than previously will gain the full award. These vocational courses help all students to make good progress in communication skills. Standards in the key skills are appropriate and IT and application of number, whilst taught by subject specialists, are applied in relevant contexts.
- 71 Teaching is good. It provides students with challenging questions that encourages them to participate in lessons, helps them to articulate their thoughts and is supportive and positive. The pace is brisk, with high expectations and lively debate, for example, in law where students discuss 'necessity' as a defence for murder. Teachers' subject knowledge is good. Their praise and encouragement helps students towards independent learning. Lessons are well paced with good classroom support materials. Suitable practical activities such as the business-studies production exercise and the Understanding Industry project for the advanced GNVQ business students helps them make sense of their learning. Teachers' high expectations lead to good standards of work from students, as demonstrated in the sample of portfolios. The practical work experience each week, for example in GNVQ land and environment, enables students to gain first-hand skills in the local community. The college's farm unit is an additional strength for this course. Where teaching is less good, expectations are too low; students are not encouraged to think and are too teacher dependent. The pace is often slow, with little opportunity for extended discussion to help raise their level of knowledge and understanding. One important factor here is the wide range of prior attainment within groups taught in some subjects.
- 72 A review during the summer has led the head of sixth form to provide a stronger and more-structured provision for students. For example, there are now regular profiles on progress, a student questionnaire on support and concerns, support staff in the study areas and a handbook for all teachers on pastoral and academic procedures. The GNVQ co-ordinator and lead teachers provide good support for the vocational courses on offer. Detailed feedback and regular tutorials to monitor performance help students to improve areas of weaknesses. Departmental records demonstrate good progress over time for many GNVQ students, especially at Advanced level. In addition, students now commit at least six periods of time-tabled private study. This level of support is already showing a positive effect on students' attainment. New initiatives, such as interactive video conferencing with three other local colleges will enable the college to offer an even wider range of courses, for example,

archaeology and psychology. However, there is still a need to offer more courses below Intermediate level to cater for the wide range of students included in the sixth form.

- 73 The college has an enrichment programme for students, which ensures that provision for careers advice and guidance, RE and PE is good and leads students to participate in lively debates and co-operative activities. Other opportunities for initiative are given through students acting as mentors for students below the sixth form, membership of the college council and participating in local community events, including the local council. The ethos in the sixth form is very good and is enabling students to mature into self-assured young adults who are committed, hard working and well motivated.

## PART C: COLLEGE DATA AND INDICATORS

### Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	206
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	69

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2%	17%	47%	25%	8%	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

### Information about the college's students

Students on the college's roll	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the college's roll	937	264
Number of full-time students eligible for free college meals	124	N/A

Special educational needs	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	34	1
Number of students on the college's special educational needs register	200	20

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	9

Student mobility in the last college year	No of students
Students who joined the college other than at the usual time of first admission	87
Students who left the college other than at the usual time of leaving	93

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
College data	8.2
National comparative data	7.9

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
College data	1.0
National comparative data	1.1

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	177	146	323

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	76	105	91
	Girls	109	89	70
	Total	185	194	161
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	College	57 (63)	60 (63)	50 (53)
	National	63 (65)	62 (59)	55 (56)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	College	25 (28)	35 (36)	14 (25)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	109	92	83
	Girls	133	92	63
	Total	242	184	146
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	College	75 (73)	57 (65)	45 (74)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	College	28 (25)	28 (33)	18 (44)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15-year-olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	148	178	326

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	43	132	142
	Girls	99	162	163
	Total	142	294	305
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	College	44 (48)	90 (89)	94 (94)
	National	48 (45)	88 (90)	94 (95)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	College	36 (36)
	National	38 (37)

Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

### Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	31	36	67

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
College	12	12	12 (15)	5	6	5 (5)
National	18	18	18 (18)	3	3	3 (3)

Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

**Ethnic background of students**

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	3
White	1192
Any other minority ethnic group	6

**Exclusions in the last college year**

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	54	3
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

**Teachers and classes****Qualified teachers and classes: Y9–Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	73.5
Number of students per qualified teacher	15.3

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

**Education support staff: Y9–Y13**

Total number of education support staff	26
Total aggregate hours worked per week	774

**Deployment of teachers: Y9–Y13**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.5%
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**Average teaching group size: Y9 – Y13**

Key Stage 2	N/A
Key Stage 3	22.2
Key Stage 4	21.8

**Financial information**

Financial year	1998 – 1999
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	£
Total income	2,934,532
Total expenditure	3,046,756
Expenditure per student	2,483
Balance brought forward from previous year	137,106
Balance carried forward to next year	24,882

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1201
Number of questionnaires returned	294

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes college.	41	48	9	1	1
My child is making good progress in college.	50	40	3	2	5
Behaviour in the college is good.	25	49	10	3	12
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	24	54	17	4	1
The teaching is good.	29	55	9	1	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	34	45	15	5	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the college with questions or a problem.	48	44	5	1	2
The college expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	56	37	4	1	2
The college works closely with parents.	28	42	25	2	3
The college is well led and managed.	36	46	7	2	9
The college is helping my child become mature and responsible.	38	51	6	2	2
The college provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	35	44	9	1	10

## **PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES**

### **ENGLISH**

- 74 Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above both the national average and that of similar colleges, and has improved since the last inspection. General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) results in both English and English literature, and A-level results are above the national average. These standards have been maintained despite a declining trend in the attainment of students entering the college. However, as at the time of the last inspection, there is a significant gap between the performance of boys and girls and, although this gap is apparent on entry, it does not narrow as students progress through the college. Consequently, girls' attainment is well above the national average at both key stages, whereas boys' attainment is below although, overall, students make very good progress between Key Stages 3 and 4. In drama, attainment at Key Stage 4 is slightly below the national average, with an improving trend since the last inspection.
- 75 Attainment in lessons at the end of Year 9 and in Key Stage 4 is around the national expectation although, in some lessons, it falls below. In the sixth form, attainment is consistently at least in line with national expectations. In drama, attainment is around the national average in Year 9.
- 76 Students' attitudes in English and drama lessons are often good or better and, at times, excellent and, although there is some incidence of unsatisfactory behaviour and attitudes, this is in a minority of lessons. Lessons, where attitudes and behaviour are excellent or very good, are characterised by a very positive and collaborative ethos for learning in which students take responsibility for their learning and, at times, for running the lesson. In the small number of lessons where attitudes and behaviour are unsatisfactory some students are inattentive during class discussions and unable to work with sustained concentration on their own or in groups.
- 77 Speaking and listening skills are well developed through all key stages in English and drama. Many students communicate effectively; often supported to do so by efficiently organised group activities. Higher-attaining students are often very articulate. Students are able to adapt speech for a variety of audiences, generally using the conventions of Standard English when this is appropriate. Lower-attaining students are well supported in developing their skills in speaking and listening although some middle-range students are not targeted sufficiently to encourage them to respond in lessons. Students are nearly always attentive when listening to the views of others and respond by making thoughtful contributions. Developing students' understanding of texts in preparation for examinations draws heavily, at all levels, on speaking and listening skills. In drama, students speak in role with conviction and are able to sustain concentration in performance.
- 78 Challenging texts are utilised in both English and drama throughout the key stages and in the sixth form. Non-fiction texts are provided through, for example, carefully chosen compilations of newspaper articles in Year 9 and students are confident in discussing implicit meaning in such texts. Students in Year 9 are not sufficiently encouraged to read independently for pleasure. Although reading logs are used, these do not lead to the development of good reading habits for all students,



especially boys. This was indicated by the very low number of fiction books that were out on loan from the Learning Resource Centre at the time of the inspection.

- 79 Sustained and expressive writing of good quality is seen at higher levels of ability and, at times, this is excellent, particularly at Key Stage 4 and A-level. In Year 9, there is a variation in the standard of written work seen with low standards of technical accuracy, particularly amongst lower sets. Although there is some variation, overall standards in spelling are satisfactory and this is an improvement since the last inspection. Teachers use key words, which are prominently displayed in all classrooms, and word banks to support students' written work. Writing frames are utilised in Year 9 and Key Stage 4 although, at times, these are provided when they might not be needed by all students and may inhibit independence. In drama, students fulfil the written component at Key Stage 4, for example, by appraising their work thoughtfully and with insight.
- 80 Teaching overall is good. At Key Stage 4, two thirds of lessons are taught well, and this includes some excellent teaching. The standard of teaching in the sixth form is consistently good. One in eight lessons is taught unsatisfactorily and this occurs mostly in Year 9. Nevertheless, in Year 9, one lesson in five is taught very well and most lessons are taught well. Students are well prepared for external examinations. In drama, while there is some unsatisfactory teaching in Year 9, most teaching is at least satisfactory with a balance in favour of good teaching. The best teaching in English is characterised by very good subject knowledge and an enthusiasm for the subject that is transmitted to students. The expert management of group activities leads to clearly defined learning outcomes that are evaluated and shared with the class. In such lessons, students are actively involved in their own learning and develop confidence and expertise in, for example, critically analysing text. When teaching is good, learning is supported through detailed marking in which targets for improvement are set so that students know what they need to do in order to improve their work. Good teaching in both English and drama is characterised by positive relationships between students and staff. In the minority of lessons, where teaching is unsatisfactory, tasks are set which are too restricting, thus limiting the capacity of students to think for themselves and, at times, leading to off-task behaviour.
- 81 The department is managed effectively. As a skilled and enthusiastic practitioner, the head of department provides a good model of teaching for the subject and takes steps to monitor standards in the department and follow up any issues with staff. Development planning identifies an appropriate range of tasks but lacks success criteria which describes success in terms of outcomes for students, so monitoring the effectiveness of action is problematic. A range of strategies to improve the attainment of boys has been trialled but these are not yet fully embedded in classroom practice. Curriculum planning is particularly detailed at Key Stage 4 and sixth form. It is satisfactory in Year 9, but there is a lack of clarity in learning outcomes for students, which build on levels of functional literacy at transfer. Accommodation issues for the department, with a large number of lessons taught in temporary classrooms, have not been addressed since the last inspection.

## **MATHEMATICS**

- 82 Standards in Key Stage 3 tests for both boys and girls are close to the national average and are in line with the national trend over the past three years. However, standards in Year 9 lessons are sometimes below those expected for typical students of this age. This is especially true of basic skills and concepts they may

have met earlier in the key stage. For example, in a revision lesson several students had to be reminded how to use a protractor and in a probability lesson there was some hesitancy in dealing with the relative size of simple fractions. Teachers are very skilful at picking up these problems and minimising the impact on standards. Although Key Stage 3 results are lower than similar schools, in lessons teachers are doing all they can and achievement is generally good.

- 83 GCSE results are unchanged from the last inspection and were close to the national average in 1999. Boys achieved slightly below average and girls slightly above. When Key Stage 3 results of these students are taken into account, they made good progress in Years 10 and 11. Work seen in the present Year 11 suggests that better results will be achieved in 2000. In GCSE coursework, higher-attaining students in particular have developed a good understanding of investigation work and can handle complex expressions in algebra.
- 84 A-level results in 1999 were mixed. Some students made good progress from their GCSE grades but others did not, and the overall picture was unsatisfactory. However, the results of these students was as good as it was in their other courses. The standard of work in the present Year 13 and in module tests is higher and at the national average.
- 85 Most students like mathematics. They work sensibly and learn how to collaborate in lessons in order to solve problems. A few younger ones can be noisy workers but this is dealt with well by the best teaching. Good study habits are developed and, by the time they reach Year 11, students can concentrate for extended periods if necessary. This is true of both higher attainers and those with special educational needs (SEN), whose attitude to their work and teachers is particularly positive. These factors account for the generally good progress made by all students. Higher-attaining students in Years 9 and 10 are particularly pleased with the pace at which they learn new topics and gain a better understanding of work met before they started at the college.
- 86 Teaching is very good overall with nine out of ten lessons taught well and no unsatisfactory teaching. The ability of staff to help students learn concepts in the subject and not just the techniques that will get the right answers is a strength. As a result, students can make connections between different aspects of the work and this enhances their learning. For example, the Year 9 boy who used his understanding of place value to explain how he would work out 15 per cent of £46. Good questioning techniques, which often pose a personal challenge for students, help them to think. In a Year 11 revision lesson, with lower-attaining students, the questions were well-structured in small steps to help deal with a number of misconceptions still apparent in their angle work. This was combined with the careful use of language, to explain for example the difference between 'measure' and 'calculate'.
- 87 Teachers encourage students to use the correct mathematical language in their responses; this is helped by words on display in most classrooms. In the best lessons, explicit links are made such as the reference words seen next to the questions in a 'quickie' test. Very occasionally, marking picks up spelling errors but overall, marking is only used to correct number work. Instances when written feedback is given are rare. The concept of marking for different purposes is underdeveloped in the department. For example, marking does not correct the presentation and accuracy of the work of some higher-attaining boys.

- 88 There is insufficient data available on what students can actually do in the subject when they transfer from their middle schools. This makes the planning of work in Year 9 difficult and unsatisfactory as a result. The skills of teachers 'thinking on their feet' help to maintain the momentum of learning. However, only the very best teaching in Year 9 ensures that students make the progress of which they are capable. The new head of department is giving a clear lead to this experienced team. Schemes of work are being rewritten to give more specific guidance on what students 'must, should and could' achieve in the various units, although the use of information technology (IT) is not yet planned into the subject. The relative teaching strengths of the team are known but not sufficiently built on to share some of the elements of individual excellence across the department. Staff have to work hard to minimise the impact of the unsatisfactory mobile classroom accommodation.

## SCIENCE

- 89 Results at the end of Key Stage 3, in 1999, were close to the national average for level 5 but below average for levels above this and well below average for similar schools. There was no difference in the attainment of boys and girls, though overall both achieved a little below the national average. In lessons in Year 9, students demonstrate practical skills and mechanical skills such as graph drawing that are in line with the national expectation. However, their ability to use scientific ideas to explain or to evaluate their findings from practical work is weak. It is this that is preventing those who are able from achieving the higher levels of attainment.
- 90 GCSE results in 1999 were well below the national average, especially for boys. Both boys and girls gained results that were below those that they attained in other subjects. The girls outperformed boys by a considerably larger amount than nationally. This does reflect a gap in the performance of boys and girls in the 1997 Key Stage 3 tests, so both genders have made satisfactory progress. In lessons, students are making good gains in knowledge and are generally working above the national expectation. However, the same weaknesses as Year 9 remain, and students have difficulty applying their learning and offering explanations.
- 91 The 1999 A-level results were poor. Results in biology and chemistry were well below the national average and physics was even worse. These were the worst results achieved since the last inspection. Over this period, the results were around or below the national average. In lessons, standards of work are below the expectation of the courses; in particular the ability of students to apply their scientific ideas to explain events and phenomenon is weak. Given the wide range of GCSE grades, with which students enter these courses, the lower attainers are making reasonable progress, but the higher attainers are not.
- 92 Teaching is satisfactory overall in Year 9, but in nearly one in three lessons it is unsatisfactory. Teachers are clear about what has to be taught and use a range of methods to teach. Many are good at questioning students to find out what they know already. However, there is a major weakness in challenging students, especially at the higher levels because teachers are unclear what these higher levels are particularly in respect of the use students should make of their knowledge and understanding of science. This why in their marking, their oral comments to students and their reports to parents, teachers are only able to offer comments in terms of greater effort and encouragement rather than offering advice on specifically what to do to improve. Consequently, students do not learn well and do

not develop their ability to evaluate and explain, because they are given insufficient opportunity or guidance to do so.

- 93 In Key Stage 4, teaching is good. Teachers are better at challenging students at an appropriate level and they use a wider range of teaching methods and set homework that extends the learning. Teachers also make good use of their subject knowledge to ask challenging questions, in talking about everyday application of ideas and to highlight misconceptions. As a result, students learn better in this key stage. Nevertheless, there remains a weakness in the demand placed on students to apply intellectual effort to their work and, as a consequence, students' ability to apply and explain limits their development of understanding at the higher levels. Teachers do not assess this ability and so are unable to give students advice that would help them improve.
- 94 In the A-level courses, teaching is satisfactory. Teachers make good use of their subject knowledge to impart this to the students and they are, therefore, able to learn the key ideas. However, the demands placed on students are too low. Whilst they learn the knowledge and skills imparted, they are given too few opportunities to think for themselves and offer explanations. On the occasions that this does happen, teachers are too eager to accept work that does not meet the rigours of A-level, and give responses that are encouraging but not critical enough. In groups that include students with a wide range of attainment at GCSE, there is a tendency to pitch the work at the level at which the lower attainers can cope so higher attainers are not stretched.
- 95 The curriculum matches requirements at all key stages. At Key Stage 4, it is enhanced by the addition of agricultural studies and the use of the farm unit, both of which benefit those students for whom this provision is more relevant. However, curriculum planning is a weakness at all three key stages. Whilst teachers are fully informed about what should be taught and they are given ideas about how they might teach it, there is no indication of what demands should be placed on students. This places a great deal of responsibility on individual teachers to use their experience to pitch the work appropriately. When this is placed alongside the lack of national curriculum data at the start of Year 9 and the lack of targets for students for the end of Year 9, it is hardly surprising that teachers get this level of challenge wrong.
- 96 In part, this illustrates a weakness in leadership. The emphasis on the development of practical skills rather than progress in the learning of scientific ideas through the increasing demands of levels within national curriculum levels for knowledge and understanding, exacerbates this situation. There is also insufficient rigour in the way the department monitors and evaluates its work. It has focused on display and homework recently and as a result has improved both of these. However, it failed to take this further into measuring what the impact of these improvements has had on attainment and quality. This was compensated for in part by a college exercise that monitored and reported on many aspects of the work of the department. From this exercise, the department was set targets for improvement. It now needs better systems to measure this.
- 97 The department has made unsatisfactory progress since the last inspection. Whilst most teachers are well qualified and suitably deployed as in 1996 and they are working hard, attainment at all three key stages has fallen. There is still a weakness in the lack of use of IT to enhance learning and accommodation remains poor.

- 98 Despite teachers' efforts with display, the laboratories do not offer an environment that makes students think they really want to be there and to learn. This is now in hand and the college anticipates great improvements when the planned building takes place.

## **ART**

- 99 Since the last inspection, GCSE results in art have fluctuated slightly and are currently just above the national average for A\*-C grades. In 1999, results in art were better than in many other subjects. There is an improving trend in the percentage of students attaining the highest grades where girls and boys achieve results above the national average, especially girls. A high number of students choose to study art at A-level and several continue their studies further when they leave the college. Results are well above the national average, particularly for A and B grades.
- 100 Many students enter the college with below-average skills. A full programme of experiences ensures sound progress and, by the end of Year 9, most students have developed a good understanding of a wide range of two-dimensional media. The department places a strong emphasis on drawing and painting and, as a result, standards in these disciplines are particularly high. Drawing is well explored through the visual elements. It is used well as the firm foundation for other activities that include collage, a range of printing techniques and textiles. Students use tone well to analyse what they see and their mark-making skills are well developed and expressive. Shell drawings, illustrating pattern and work related to the 'Shoe' project, are excellent examples of effective use of pattern and colour.
- 101 At Key Stage 4, students build on their skills and develop very personal responses to open-ended tasks. They develop their ideas confidently in both practical and theoretical terms and the critical studies element of their work is well integrated into course work. Students are able to explain the ways in which different artists have influenced their ideas and the increased use of literacy skills is evident in their sketchbooks and the quality of their work. Provision for work in three-dimensional studies and in a variety of scales is limited and this aspect lacks breadth of experience.
- 102 The work of A-level students, in both art and design and textiles, is outstanding. The Year 12 'Structure' project illustrates students' impressive ability to develop and transfer complex images. Students show great depth and personal feelings in their work and striking examples of moral and social issues are clearly displayed in public areas in the college. In textiles, the exploratory and experimental nature of working contributes to the stunning workbooks in Year 12. For example, in the personal studies for a wall hanging utilising the theme of 'White'. Students are positively influenced by visits to galleries and the work of other cultures features strongly in their studies.
- 103 Students have a mature attitude to their work and behaviour in lessons is excellent. They respect and value each other's opinions and are confident with creative and spontaneous ways of working. They show great pride in their work and willingly discuss the processes and development of their ideas.

- 104 The quality of teaching is very good. Strengths in teaching lie in teachers' expertise, inspiration and good subject knowledge. They have a strong commitment to providing a challenging curriculum and a supportive environment where all students are encouraged to succeed. Relationships are excellent and make a very positive contribution to effective learning and the personal development of students. Mutual respect is shown by students and teachers, listening well to each other and sharing their feelings and beliefs. Teaching is less secure when there is insufficient focus on students' learning. In a small number of lessons in Year 9, teaching does not build sufficiently on what students already know, understand and can do and there is a lack of challenge for the higher-attaining students. Assessment procedures are in place but are variable in practice within the department.
- 105 The department is well led. Close, collaborative working amongst staff, a positive ethos and shared vision helps to make it an effective department. Since the last inspection, the provision and use of IT has improved. Whilst at an early stage of development, several A-level students are making good use of IT in their personal studies and the department is committed to further development in this area. Strong links are developing within the creative and expressive arts team and a more integrated approach is successfully promoted through visits to galleries and other countries.
- 106 The art rooms are visually stimulating and well organised but the lack of workspace and storage for large-scale work restricts possibilities for sculpture and three-dimensional study. The value placed on creativity and individuality is evident in the high-quality displays and interaction with students. This contributes effectively to the celebration of achievement and enhances the college environment significantly.

## **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

- 107 At the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is broadly in line with national expectations. Amongst the range of specialist areas, students achieve higher standards when working with textiles than with other materials.
- 108 At GCSE, attainment is above national averages. Within the range of GCSE subjects, however, there are significant variations. Attainment in textiles technology is very high, GCSE results are very good and the standards in designing and practical work are first class. Standards achieved in food technology are high, whilst in graphic products, they are broadly in line with national expectations. Results in resistant materials are below national averages although students' achievements are in line with their work in other subjects. Attainment in electronic products was well below average in the 1999 GCSE examinations. Currently, whilst there is evidence of some good work being completed, some of the finished work still lacks accuracy and precision. There are hugely significant differences between the proportions of girls and boys achieving higher-grade results. This is, in part, related to the numbers of girls who study textiles and food courses, whilst the majority of boys follow resistant materials and electronic products courses.
- 109 In the sixth form, the most recent A-level results for design and for home economics were below the national average. However, the work currently being undertaken shows an improvement with standards now being in line with national expectations.

- 110 The quality of teaching is good. Teachers are well qualified, hard working and highly skilled in their specialist working areas. Teaching is best in Key Stage 4, particularly in GCSE textiles technology lessons where teaching is excellent.
- 111 In Year 9, the quality of teaching is very good. The strengths of teaching and learning lie in the teaching of basic manufacturing skills, the management of students and resources and the high-quality relationships between teachers and students. This results in students making good progress and being able to sustain their learning throughout lessons. There are some occasional shortcomings in teaching when levels of teacher expectations sometimes fall below those that would be appropriate for students of this age. This is partially due to a lack of teacher confidence in students' prior learning experiences and attainment.
- 112 In Key Stage 4, teaching is consistently good, with some excellent teaching. Teachers' knowledge of the subject materials is good and the teaching is well focused towards the requirements of the examinations. Units of work and individual lessons are well planned and there is sometimes evidence of real flair in the teaching.
- 113 The quality of teaching of the A-level courses is good. Students' practical project work is well organised and effectively managed and they are well supported in their efforts to achieve high standards. Teaching of some of the theoretical aspects of the courses, however, can be rather staid.
- 114 Students' attitudes, behaviour and response in design and technology lessons are very good. In almost all lessons, they display a positive attitude towards their work. Levels of co-operation and collaboration in practical lessons are good, with students demonstrating maturity and respect for each other and the working facilities.
- 115 In Year 9, although students are able to engage in a broad range of designing and making activities, in a good range of materials, there is insufficient opportunity for students to work with systems and control technology equipment. In this respect, the curriculum does not comply with statutory requirements. Within food technology lessons, whilst students are able to develop practical culinary skills and a broad knowledge of nutrition, opportunities for controlled and focused designing activities are limited. The provision for textiles technology is excellent. The 'combat' project in which students design and make leisure garments is a first-class example of a well-structured, rigorous and very popular unit of work.
- 116 The day-to-day management of resources, health and safety matters and oversight of the department is satisfactory. Teachers work hard to overcome inadequacies in accommodation and are, to a large part, successful. There is useful documentation transferred from the middle schools showing what each student has experienced in Years 7 and 8. However, the management of the development of the curriculum, including evidence of an appropriate strategic view and long-term vision for the subject, lacks some conviction. The arrangements across the department for the rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning are not developed. There is little evidence that the appropriate priorities for action have been identified, such as the discrepancy between girls' and boys' attainment, and adequate preparation for the new National Curriculum. The co-ordination of the provision for textiles and food, as separate entities is effectively organised.

- 117 Since the last inspection, there have been improvements in the quality of teaching, students' behaviour and attitudes, and in levels of attainment in food and textiles. However, standards are currently lower in other areas of the subject and the provision for systems and control technology remain under developed.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

- 118 At the last inspection, attainment was sound across the college. In 1999, teacher assessment of students at the end of Key Stage 3 indicated that the number of students obtaining level 5 and above was higher than the national average. Evidence shows clearly that student attainment is satisfactory and in line with the national average. The attainment of girls is better than that of boys within Year 9.
- 119 The number of students attaining A\*-C grades at GCSE has fluctuated since the last inspection when they were well above average. In 1999, results were above the national average. The attainment of girls was significantly better than that of boys and the number of students attaining A\*/A grades was very low. The current attainment in classes is mainly above average. Many pieces of coursework, developed independently, are of a very high standard as they are in A-level classes.
- 120 The average points score for A-level candidates rose from the time of the last inspection until 1999 when it fell significantly to well below the national average. The current attainment of students in A-level groups varies across the whole range of A-level grades. This reflects the open access policy towards taking the subject in this key stage and makes teaching difficult.
- 121 Students make satisfactory progress in Year 9. In Key Stage 4, students generally make good progress. Progress in the sixth form is satisfactory. Across the college, students have a good understanding and use of geographical vocabulary. They develop and use appropriately a range of geographical skills. Literacy, numeracy and IT skills are well applied by many students. Place knowledge is satisfactory, and the understanding of geographical processes is often good. Higher-attaining students clearly identify geographical patterns and apply them to new areas of learning. The majority of students have a good knowledge and understanding of environmental issues.
- 122 Although slightly more variable in Year 9, the great majority of students respond in a very positive way towards the subject. They sustain concentration, are very well behaved and have a good attitude to learning. Students are very happy to work individually, in pairs or larger groups. They are confident, when given the opportunity, to share their knowledge and understanding, as well as personal viewpoints, which are valued and respected by their peers. Relationships across the department are very positive. Students in Year 10 undertaking coastal fieldwork on Minehead seafront, in groups during lesson time, do so in an extremely sensible and well-organised fashion. Coursework produced by older students, as a requirement for external examination, shows high levels of personal commitment outside of college hours.
- 123 The quality of teaching across the department is good. Teaching is better within Key Stage 4 and the sixth form than in Year 9. Staff have good subject knowledge and expertise which ensures that lessons are carefully planned and the range of activities undertaken by the students are both relevant, challenging and supportive of the development of thinking skills. Emphasis is placed on the development of



enquiry, investigative, problem solving, decision-making, research and fieldworking skills. Very good use is made of the local area and more-distant fieldworking venues, to enhance teaching and learning. Learning is also significantly enhanced by the teaching of appropriate geographical skills and techniques, and the modelling of good practice, for example, with regard to planning and undertaking personal fieldwork.

- 124 A wide range of opportunities is in place to support the development and application of literacy and numeracy skills. Teaching in the department significantly enhances these key skills and, since the last inspection, greater opportunities exist for using IT, for example, to support global population studies in Year 9.
- 125 Aspects of teaching that are slightly less secure include: the use of questioning styles which fail to let students demonstrate fully what they know and understand; marking that is regular but gives few comments to help students improve the standard of their work; the matching of planned activities to the needs of the students, especially the higher attainers; and the use of day-to-day assessment to inform planning. The subject leader is aware of the weaker components of teaching in the department and of the need for focused monitoring and action if standards are to continue to improve.
- 126 The subject plays an important role in the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students. However, this is of an ad-hoc nature.
- 127 The subject is efficiently managed by a very effective head of department. All teachers work well as a team and are committed to providing not only high-quality geographical experiences for the students, but also a continued raising of standards. Procedures for sustaining the improvement made since the last inspection are clearly articulated within its development plan. The department has correctly highlighted liaison with feeder schools and the refinement of assessment procedures within Year 9 as major areas for development.
- 128 Classroom display provides a stimulating environment in which to learn. The quality and range of resources is satisfactory, there are sufficient texts for students in Key Stage 4 to have copies to loan, and this supports their learning well.

## **HISTORY**

- 129 History is a strong and popular subject within the college with a reputation for achieving consistently good examination results at both GCSE and A-level for many years. Although the GCSE results were not as good last year, they were still just above national average for A\*-C grades and, the year before, were well above. The gap between girls' and boys' attainment is narrower than it is nationally. At Key Stage 4, attainment is just above the national average. Students have good factual knowledge of all aspects of the course. Year 11 students are able to identify key factors which advanced or hindered the development of medicine and can cite appropriate examples to support their judgements. The majority of students make good progress and are particularly well prepared for answering GCSE questions.
- 130 At A-level, students achieve results above the national average for A-E grades. Over recent years, there has always been a high proportion of top grades. Standards in lessons are in line with expectations but analysis of students' work shows that attainment is higher than this. For example, Year 13 students are able to

analyse complex documents and to explain why Soviet history has been re-written. They have full and well-organised notes on all topics showing evidence of wider reading. Students develop effective study techniques from early in Year 12, and their teachers' high expectations and good subject knowledge combine to ensure that they make at least good progress.

- 131 In Year 9, standards are just below national expectations. Students have an appropriate grasp of chronology and are well informed about events such as the Treaty of Versailles and the rise of Hitler. Students of all abilities can offer sound explanations and can describe the characteristic features of periods studied. However, they do not develop their ability to evaluate historical sources and historical interpretations in enough depth. Progress across the key stage is at least satisfactory for most students.
- 132 Numbers opting to follow the subject, particularly in the sixth form, are high. In all classes, there is a strong work ethic and a positive attitude to the subject. Much of this stems from the purposeful teaching and the motivating effects of the excellent display work both within the classrooms and the corridors. In the majority of lessons, students develop not only their knowledge and understanding but also a wider range of skills. This is a particular feature of the GCSE and A-level lessons where sixth form students are encouraged to make presentations using a range of techniques. Students in Year 9 are also given responsibility to work out answers for themselves. One lesson presented groups of students with images of anti-Semitism from Nazi Germany that they had to classify under given headings to show how Nazi policy changed.
- 133 Teaching is consistently good. At Key Stage 4, and in the sixth form, it is very good and expectations are high. Relationships are very good. Teachers' subject knowledge is very secure and students are given work that is always appropriate. Study guides, prepared for GCSE and A-level students, are of high quality and preparation for the examinations by hard-working and enthusiastic staff is very thorough. In Year 9, the teaching is never less than satisfactory and often good. Some imaginative work is set but it is not always pitched at the right level because not enough use is made of information of students' prior attainment to ensure that the challenge of the work is always appropriate. This means that students' progress is erratic and much stronger in some aspects than others. Whilst the overall quality of teaching is not quite as high as reported in the last inspection, the rigour has been maintained.
- 134 The department is well led and efficiently managed with a clear view of its strengths and weaknesses. It continues to maintain its high profile through events such as the innovative 'Britain at War' day. To improve further, it needs to define and assess more precisely the teaching objectives for Year 9, to broaden its initiatives in the use of IT, and to continue to enrich the textbook provision at each key stage.

## **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

- 135 Attainment in information technology (IT) lessons in Year 9 matches national average overall, although the number of students gaining higher levels is below this. The work in lessons shows that lower-attaining students reach standards that are above those expected. However, the work does not provide opportunities for higher-attaining students to achieve appropriately high levels.

- 136 At Key Stage 4, standards in National Curriculum IT lessons match those expected nationally. IT is used effectively to support particular aspects of students' work in areas such as careers. In both key stages, students with SEN make good progress and achieve standards above those expected.
- 137 The work covers all aspects of the national curriculum. There is a particular emphasis on communicating information using desktop publishing, graphics and presentation software. Spreadsheets are effectively used to handle number and data and they are used to model IT use in business and commercial applications. Insufficient attention is given to computer control in IT lessons and it is not used as it should be in other subjects, such as design and technology. There is some effective use of IT in other subjects such as geography and music, but, overall, students at all key stages, including the sixth form, are given insufficient opportunities to use IT to support their learning in subjects of the curriculum. Work is inconsistent both within and between subjects. Students often use their own computers effectively and some work of real quality is produced at home. This contributes to higher standards both in IT and in the subject concerned.
- 138 GCSE results in IT are significantly better than those achieved nationally. Overall, students do better in IT than in other subjects in the college. Girls achieve much better results than boys do. The college now offers a course in office practice. Standards in lessons are in line with those achieved nationally.
- 139 At A-level last year, standards were higher overall in IT than other subjects. However, the number of students was small and this result is not consistent from year to year. Standards in lessons are in line with those expected nationally.
- 140 Teaching in IT is good. Teachers have a good knowledge of the subject and deliver it with confidence and authority. In Year 9, teaching is always at least satisfactory and in some lessons it is good. At Key Stage 4, teaching is always at least good and often very good. It is this teaching which ensures the good results achieved. In the best lessons, students are very clear what they have to learn and how it fits into the requirements of the course. The work set makes use of students' existing knowledge of IT and its use outside college. Teachers encourage lively student response and offer good individual support. They have high expectations of the students and set them challenging tasks. In the sixth form, teaching is good although, sometimes, teachers do not use a wide-enough range of approaches within lessons and students are forced to work in the same way for too long.
- 141 Students respond well in IT. They behave sensibly, treat equipment with care and work with interest and enthusiasm. They work well together and take responsibility for their work. When given the opportunity, they work well independently. Their oral work is often very good with well-thought-out questions and responses that make effective use of their existing knowledge and experience of IT.
- 142 The management of IT is satisfactory. There is a clear direction for the subject, which is reflected in the IT development plan. It draws together a number of initiatives into a coherent whole and has been developed to make effective use of the new buildings and resources. Good technical support ensures that equipment is well presented and reliable. The new initiative to allow more opportunities for teachers to work together to identify and evaluate good practice is starting to show some benefits. It has led to the introduction and evaluation of some single-sex lessons and these are effective in raising standards in boys' as well as girls' achievement. However, insufficient use is made of the many strengths in the

department. Good practice is not always sufficiently identified and shared and teachers have too few opportunities to work with and support each other. As a result, schemes of work and resource materials are not as comprehensive and coherent as they could be. This should be a focus for further development. Key Stage 4 reports do not include a comment on every student's progress in IT as required.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

- 143 Results at GCSE in French are currently below the national average. Boys do significantly less well than boys nationally and the difference between boys' and girls' attainment is greater than it is nationally. Boys and girls achieve similar results in French as in their other subjects. In German, boys' and girls' results are well above the national average. The smaller number of boys who take German do better than the girls who achieve noticeably less well than in their other subjects. A very small number of students take French or German at A-level. Until 1999, when results were very low, students' achievement compared favourably with national figures.
- 144 At the end of Key Stage 3, the college records students' attainment as being significantly above average, but this is not borne out in lessons where, in all aspects of language, students are marginally below average. This is particularly the case in speaking where students only give short responses to their teachers and rely on prompts. In Years 10 and 11, students' listening skills develop well, especially in those classes where teachers speak French and German consistently. In these lessons, students' pronunciation is also clear and understandable because their teachers have given them a good model to follow. Many students have a good knowledge of grammar but are less proficient at using this to express themselves effectively in speaking and writing. There are some noticeable exceptions in Year 11 where, for example, students have used the opportunity to research and produce a travel itinerary to display an accurate command of both past and future tenses.
- 145 At A-level, students express themselves more fully and confidently and, with reminders, use their knowledge of grammar to improve their accuracy and correct their mistakes. Their breadth of vocabulary knowledge is good.
- 146 Teaching is satisfactory in more than half the lessons. In a quarter, it is good or very good. The least effective teaching is in French in Year 9 where there is a high proportion of unsatisfactory teaching. Although teachers plan carefully to link activities to a topic, too often the pitch of the work does not build on what students can already do. Activities often focus on single words of vocabulary with which students are already familiar. Where the teacher has higher expectations of what students should learn to do, the steps for them to achieve the learning are not explained. In German, even when the students are learning vocabulary, the challenge to pronounce new words well and to work and respond at speed is far higher than in French.
- 147 In Key Stage 4, teaching is usually satisfactory and quite frequently very good. In the sixth form, teaching is always satisfactory or better. Teachers have higher expectations of what students can achieve and prepare them thoroughly for the demands of the examination. In the most effective lessons, in particular in German, language is used with humour and real enthusiasm both to motivate and involve students and to set high standards of comprehension and pronunciation.

- 148 Across the department, teachers use a wide range of techniques to present or practise new language although there is less variety in the ways in which students are guided to consolidate new knowledge. This restricts their capacity for expressing themselves more freely in Key Stage 4. In the Key Stage 4 lessons, where teaching is not satisfactory, the work is not pitched at the right level for students to make progress and the modern foreign language is used irregularly. This reduces students' opportunities to hear and use the language for themselves.
- 149 In all key stages, teachers do not systematically draw students' attention to learning strategies or shortcuts, depriving them of a means of thinking more for themselves. Students are also given few opportunities to work collaboratively; this cuts down their capacity to learn independently of their teacher.
- 150 In all years, students' behaviour is at least satisfactory. They concentrate well and carry out the tasks set by their teacher. In Year 9, students are relatively passive in lessons except where, as in most German lessons, the breathtaking pace set by the teacher sweeps them along. In Years 10 and 11, attitudes to the subject are generally good and in the sixth form always good. At each key stage, listening skills develop well. In Year 9, this is at the expense of speaking skills, which remain at the level of single words. Through Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, students develop their knowledge of grammar and improve their written accuracy. In the sixth form, students become increasingly confident and willing to express their own ideas and opinions when speaking French or German.
- 151 In Year 9, students do not know how well they are doing or how best to improve. This is due in part to teachers who do not explain to students what they will learn in a lesson. More importantly, National Curriculum levels are not used throughout Key Stage 3 by teachers or students as a means of assessing progress or planning for it. At the beginning of Year 9, in French, teachers know what topics students have covered but know less about what students can do with the modern foreign language they have learned. Guidance in curriculum planning also does not make clear what students will be expected to be able to do by the end of Key Stage 3. These are significant factors in inhibiting the progress students make before they reach Key Stage 4.
- 152 There are significant strengths in the department and it is in a good position to improve further. The head of department is highly dedicated. The department has hardworking teachers, some of whom are very good examples of effective practice in using German or French creatively and with real purpose for learners. These teachers are also good at motivating students at all attainment levels to learn and achieve. The relative newness of more than half the department provides the opportunity to achieve a more consistent use of the best practice between teachers of German and of French. The overriding priority weakness is the standards in Year 9 and the lack of information about students' attainment on entry which is resulting in planning, teaching and feedback to students which does not have a sound basis in levels of progress.

## MUSIC

- 153 Music is a lively, active and fast growing department within the college's provision for the creative arts.
- 154 Although lower-attaining students enter the college with weak rhythmic and keyboard skills, good teaching of well-pitched activities enable them to make satisfactory progress in Year 9 so that, for example, they are able to compose and perform the first part of a simple song but have difficulty extending it. Higher attainers in Year 9 play keyboards confidently and fluently. They use harmony in their compositions and are able to develop ideas in a variety of musical styles. They understand and use appropriate musical vocabulary when responding to music. Students respond well to all practical music activities and, by the end of Key Stage 3, overall attainment is in line with the range of national expectations.
- 155 There has recently been a big increase in the number of students taking the subject in Key Stage 4. Higher-attaining students perform fluently and expressively on their own instruments such as flute, saxophone and guitar and tackle sight-reading confidently. Their compositions show a good understanding of harmony, style and structure and they make effective use of computer programmes to record and notate their pieces. Lower-attaining students make satisfactory progress at a simpler technical level. At the time of the previous inspection, GCSE results were below average, but since then they have been at or above the national average for grades A\*-C. The overall attainment of current Key Stage 4 students is at the national average.
- 156 The new A-level group is making good progress in developing a sound understanding of musical periods and styles. Their performing skills are above average but they lack confidence in composing extended pieces.
- 157 The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Very good features include the use of teachers' own skills to demonstrate musical features and to support and inspire students so that they are able to feel the success of musical achievement within the lesson. Another key approach is the extensive use of questioning to check students' understanding which ensures that students work at a good pace, are fully involved and make good progress in their performing and composing. Students enjoy the well-organised lessons. The quality of learning is also good because students respond with interest to challenging tasks appropriate to their ability, concentrating and applying themselves to the music making whether as a class, group or individually. Students' progress is assessed and the effectiveness of the musical activities is monitored leading to improvement of the teaching programmes. The only unsatisfactory lesson observed took place in a classroom with no music facilities in which the students had no opportunity to make musical progress. This illustrates the inadequacy of the accommodation and resources for the growing number of students involved in music. The quality of the instrumental lesson observed was good but the level of absence of visiting staff is adversely affecting the progress of some students.
- 158 The provision of extra-curricular opportunities in music is good. During the last twelve months, a full programme of performing events has been organised, including concerts in the community, a major musical production and a large-scale inter-college concert. A very good jazz band has developed as the department's flagship and there is a wind band and other wind and string groups catering for

students of different ability. At lunch times and after college when formal groups are not rehearsing, the music rooms are taken over by college rock groups. A fruitful collaboration with the local Arts Society has resulted in workshops and concerts with professional musicians.

- 159 The main weakness is the unrefined methods for assessing students' attainment in Year 9 and the planning of work for Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

- 160 Standards in physical education (PE) meet national expectations in Year 9 for all but a small minority of students who are achieving well for their ability, though they just fail to meet the national expectation. Students work effectively in gymnastics and games activities, showing sound basic skills and an appropriate understanding of how to use and improve these skills in practical performance. In Key Stage 4, and sixth-form lessons, students display good knowledge about activity and their preparation for it, and accurate skills in the differing games activities they experience working individually, in groups and in teams. Standards of attainment in GCSE are good. Last year, students achieved well above the national average for A\*-C grades. Improving the quality of learning and teaching in the theory lessons has been a key focus for the department and there has been significant improvement in this aspect of the department's work. The quality of teaching of the theoretical component of the examination course is very good, as is the teaching of A-level. At each level, teachers involve students in lively, independent and guided analytical study. A-level moderation supports the department's predicted success rate for the current, first group of students in June 2000. The high quality of the work of teachers and students in the examined courses is a strength of the department.
- 161 Students' response is at least satisfactory in lessons. In a very high proportion of lessons in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, student response is very good. Students are very positive about PE and they enjoy both practical and theoretical aspects of their courses. Students learn very effectively in all lessons in each key stage. In Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, learning is predominantly good and is very good in a high proportion of lessons. Students show good initiative and competence to work alone and with others, and they enjoy the challenge of working independently whenever required. Their ability to prepare effectively for the practical lessons begins in Year 9 and their knowledge and understanding of how to warm-up, its value and effect, is very well developed as the students move through the college. Written work is at a high level and students take great pride in successfully fulfilling the demands of the theory aspects of Key Stage 4 and sixth form courses. There is some evidence of IT being used to support and enhance the quality of response in student files and in departmental display, but the application of new technology is underdeveloped. Teachers mark work very carefully though they do not give precise feedback about how an individual student might improve their response.
- 162 Teaching is good in Year 9 and in Key Stage 4 and very good in sixth-form lessons. Teachers work with very good subject knowledge, which they use very effectively to plan and deliver a curriculum that is well matched to students' needs. Teachers make good use of a range of different groupings and varied teaching approaches to challenge individual students to respond effectively. Students of differing ability and aptitude are enabled to respond with confidence in differing contexts. Teachers know their students well and make good use of their evidence about individuals'

performance to plan the next stage of learning. Lessons are well resourced. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Information about students' experiences in Years 7 and 8 provide a useful basis for the work in Year 9. Assessment procedures are well developed and efficiently undertaken in the department, ensuring students make satisfactory and better progress as they move through the college.

- 163 Lessons are conducted with good pace and good organisation. Teachers work very hard to ensure individual students achieve success in their lessons. Relationships in lessons are very good. Individual teachers in the department take lead roles in the development of different aspects of the high-quality curriculum on offer. In carrying out these responsibilities, they are ably led and guided by a very competent subject manager and, overall, management is very good.
- 164 The very good quality of accommodation and learning resources significantly enhance the overall quality of the curriculum. An excellent range of extended PE and sports clubs and teams adds significantly to the overall experience on offer to all students. Individuals and groups of students achieve significant success in a range of sporting activities including swimming, mountain biking, and team games. PE is making a significant and valuable contribution to the moral, social and cultural life and work of the college.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

- 165 The college has made good progress since the last inspection in securing all students' entitlement to statutory religious education (RE).
- 166 Attainment of students at GCSE, A and AS-level is broadly in line with expectations. The number of students who have taken the subject to examination level in recent years has been very small, making accurate comparative judgements difficult. Evidence from lessons and students' work shows that they achieve well. Their ability to analyse and evaluate religious, ethical and philosophical material is always good and sometimes very good. Students often produce extended written work of high quality.
- 167 Evidence indicates that students' attainment on entry to the college in Year 9 is well below expectations. Their knowledge and understanding of religion is weak and most do not have an appropriate framework of concepts and skills about the subject. By the end of Year 9, attainment remains well below average and the progress students make is, in many cases, unsatisfactory. Only the higher-attaining students make satisfactory progress and reach the level expected. Students tend to make more progress in relation to their ability to understand key social and human issues. Their progress in relation to learning about, and applying their understanding of, religion is particularly weak. The rate of progress is significantly affected by the pattern of staffing in the subject where extensive use is made of non-specialist teachers.
- 168 Attainment in the statutory programmes at Key Stage 4 and the sixth form is slightly below expectations, although students make significant progress in their ability to interpret and analyse social and moral issues. However, their progress remains hampered by their lack of a secure understanding of world religions. For example, in Key Stage 4, they make good progress in investigating the north/south economic divide but many cannot relate religious perspectives to the emerging issues.



- 169 Students' attitudes vary. In all examination, and some non-examination classes, their response to the subject is good or very good. There are good examples of students collaborating well, exercising initiative and showing independence. Elsewhere, students are often passive, have low expectations about their learning, and occasionally behave inappropriately. Overall, however, students show good respect for each other's views and opinions.
- 170 The quality of teaching and learning in examination classes is always good and sometimes very good. Challenging and imaginative tasks, clear explanations and effective intervention by their teacher ensure that all students' learning is of high quality. Occasionally, the opportunities to extend students' oral contributions are not strong enough. The quality of teaching and learning in the statutory programme at Key Stage 4 and the sixth form is satisfactory overall. Good use is made of praise and exposition to support students' learning but teachers' command of the subject is sometimes insecure and students are not always provided with sufficient insight into the purpose and structure of their learning. In Year 9, teaching and learning is unsatisfactory. Where there is specialist teaching, the quality is at least satisfactory but many lessons are taught by non-specialist teachers, who often struggle to clarify the purpose of the learning and frequently pitch tasks at the wrong level.
- 171 The curriculum meets statutory requirements. The strength of this provision includes a certificate of achievement at Key Stage 4, half-day focuses on RE in the sixth form, and work on beliefs and values in the core AS/GCSE courses in General Studies. The college has negotiated the provision for RE with the feeder schools to ensure appropriate coverage of the requirements of the Somerset Agreed Syllabus, but the pattern of the curriculum in Year 9 is currently weak and does not ensure an appropriate match to students' needs and capabilities. The subject is well managed by a dedicated head of department. A start has been made on developing assessment procedures but these are currently over-complex and do not secure accurate or consistent judgements, particularly in Year 9. The subject makes good provision for students' spiritual, moral and social development but the contribution to their inter-cultural understanding is more limited. Monitoring of students' attainment and the quality of teaching and learning is weak but the department has a clear commitment to improvement.
- 172 Weaknesses remain in the standards in Year 9 that are brought about by the negative impact of non-specialist staffing and the curriculum and assessment arrangements.