

INSPECTION REPORT

COWLEY LANGUAGE COLLEGE

St Helens

LEA area: St Helens

Unique reference number: 104829

Principal : Mr C Sheeran

Reporting inspector: Mr D Pittman
16976

Dates of inspection: 13 – 17 January 2003

Inspection number: 249728

Full inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 – 19 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Hard Lane
St Helens

Postcode: WA10 6LB

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Appropriate authority: Governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr J H Clegg

Date of previous inspection: 3rd March 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
16976	Mr D Pittman	Registered inspector		<p>What sort of school is it?</p> <p>How high are standards? – The school's results and the pupils' achievements</p> <p>How well are pupils and students taught?</p> <p>How well is the school led and managed?</p>
12682	James Griffin	Lay inspector	Educational inclusion	<p>How high are standards?</p> <p>Attitudes, values and personal development</p> <p>How well does the college care for its pupils and students?</p> <p>How well does the school work in partnership with parents?</p>
4426	Terry Fitchett	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages (NC and SF)	
31192	John Stewart	Team inspector	Physical education (NC and SF)	
27984	Alan Whitehall	Team inspector	Mathematics (NC and SF)	
12499	Marie Durkin	Team inspector	<p>English as an additional language</p> <p>English (NC and SF)</p>	

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
20533	David Rogers	Team inspector	Art and design (NC)	How good are curricular and other opportunities?
22906	Barry Hodgson	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (NC and SF)	
20825	Brian Ogden	Team inspector	Geography (NC and SF) Citizenship (NC)	
7399	Paul Roberts	Team inspector	History (NC and SF)	
11672	Peter Harle	Team inspector	Music (NC)	
1517	David Griffith	Team inspector	Special educational needs Religious education (NC and SF)	
4922	Michael Driver	Team inspector	Science (NC) Biology (SF)	
15277	Christopher Vidler	Team inspector	Business studies (SF)	
1759	Geoffrey Edwards	Team inspector	Design and technology (NC and SF)	

NC = National Curriculum

SF = Sixth Form

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Cowley College is a larger than average comprehensive school with an average-size sixth form. There are 1374 pupils and students on roll with 197 students in the sixth form. The school was recently awarded Language College status in September 2001 and is also involved in the 'Excellence in Cities' initiative. The school has also gained recognition in sport (Sportsmark 2000) and the arts (Artsmark 2001); the number of students involved in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme is exceptionally large. The school takes pupils from up to 28 primary schools. Many pupils live in the large housing estates around the school. The socio-economic circumstances of pupils and students are varied, but are generally below average; the number of students eligible for free college meals is above average. Very few pupils come from a minority ethnic background; five are in the early stages of acquiring English. Around 17 per cent of students are on the school's register for special educational needs, and approximately two per cent of students have a Statement of Special Educational Need; both statistics are broadly in line with the national average. The overall standard of attainment pupils when they enter Cowley College is below average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Cowley College provides a good quality education that has some outstanding features. These features are reflected in the high quality of provision for languages, sport and art. Standards of attainment in comparison with similar schools are well above average. Students achieve well as the result of good teaching. The quality of leadership and management provided by key staff is good. Students' personal development is significantly enhanced by an ethos that is supportive yet also based upon high expectations. Staff work well together and show a strong commitment to the shared objectives of continuing improvement; the extra-curricular provision is excellent. Relationships are good; this is reflected in generally good standards of behaviour and the developing maturity of students. The school gives good value for money.

What the college does well

- Standards of attainment in examinations are well above average in comparison with similar schools.
- Pupils and students are taught well enabling them to make good progress.
- The leadership and management provided by key staff are good.
- Students' attitudes to learning and their behaviour are good.
- The range of curriculum opportunities is good; the provision for extra-curricular activities is excellent.
- The quality of care, support and guidance, including assessment procedures, is good.
- The standards achieved and the quality of provision in physical education is excellent.

What could be improved

- Test and examination results in mathematics and science.
- Attendance in Years 10 and 11.
- Variety in teaching methods to account for pupils' different learning styles.
- The provision for citizenship.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Cowley College has made good progress since the previous inspection in 1997. Standards of attainment in Years 10 and 11 are now well above average relative to similar schools, but National Curriculum test performance in Years 7 to 9 has fallen. The quality of teaching has improved and is a factor in promoting pupils' higher levels of achievement in some subjects. Assessment data is more comprehensive and provides useful information for target setting. The key curriculum issues about improving the range of language courses and the provision for design and technology have been very effectively addressed. The vocational dimension of the curriculum is now good. The college has made

varied responses to national initiatives in literacy, numeracy and citizenship. Its provision for numeracy and citizenship is unsatisfactory. The commitment and hard work of senior management and governors, and the support of parents has led to significant improvements in the quality of accommodation and buildings through its Language College status and in provision of computers.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 11 and sixth form students at the end of Year 13, based on average point scores in GCSE and A/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
GCSE examinations	C	D	D	A
A levels/AS levels	*	D	C	

Key

well above average A
 above average B
 average C
 below average D
 well below average E

* The method for recording examination performance changed in 2001, so comparisons with data before that time are inappropriate.

In the 2002 National Curriculum tests for 14-year-olds, the combined results were below the national average. In English, attainment was in line with national averages, but for mathematics and science attainment was well below average. Girls' attainment in mathematics and science was particularly low. In comparison with similar schools, English results were well above average. For mathematics and science, results were comparable to those of similar schools. Overall, attainment in these three subjects is above that of similar schools. However, the overall trend in test performances is below the national picture. In general, pupils do not achieve as well as their prior attainment indicates in mathematics and science; this underachievement was particularly significant in mathematics.

The trend in GCSE results is in line with the national trend. Attainment in the grade range 5 A* to C was also in line with most other schools. Examination performance was good in art and design, design and technology, German, physical education and vocational subjects. Attainment in English, mathematics and geography was not as high as it should have been. Attainment in the sixth form in 2002 was broadly average. Students achieved well in mathematics, physical education and religious education.

The target set in 2002 for the higher GCSE grades was missed by a small margin although they were achieved for broader grade range. The targets for 2003 are realistic, but possibly not sufficiently challenging.

In lessons, attainment in Years 7 to 9 is above average in physical education and in line with expectations for all other subjects apart from science, geography, music and religious education where it is below average. Attainment in mathematics has improved significantly. In Years 10 and 11 attainment is above average in physical education and art and design; it is in line with national averages in design and technology, ICT, modern languages and religious education. Attainment is below average in all other subjects. Given pupils' attainment on entry, their progress in most subjects is generally good. Overall achievement in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy is below average. Standards of work in the sixth form broadly reflect national averages.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the college	Good. Pupils show a commitment to and an enthusiasm for their studies; their positive attitudes help them to learn successfully. Their involvement

	in extra-curricular activities is very good.
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Aspect	Comment
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good overall. The movement around a complex and large site is generally well ordered and disciplined. Among a small minority of pupils, mostly boys, there is occasional jostling, although this is rarely malicious.
Personal development and relationships	Good overall. Most pupils are responsible and show appropriate thought for others. They are comfortable speaking with visitors. Students respond well to the opportunities offered by their year councils. The positive relationships promoted within the college are a major strength.
Attendance	Unsatisfactory. Attendance is below the national average; it is particularly an issue in Years 10 and 11. Unauthorised absence is above average.

The year councils, comprising two pupils from each form, are generally making an effective contribution in each year group. The impact of the college council, comprising two pupils from each year group, is currently more limited.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Good	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.

The overall quality of teaching is good. There were examples of excellent teaching in physical education, dance and Latin. The quality of teaching meets the needs of students well. Standards of teaching in English, mathematics and science are generally good. A small number of lessons had unsatisfactory features; these occurred in drama, mathematics, geography and science. The National Literacy, Numeracy and Key Stage 3 Strategies have been introduced into the college, but require more consistency in implementation. Across the college, the main teaching strengths are the teachers' knowledge of their subjects, effective planning, classroom management and the good support and encouragement for pupils. Some lessons had insufficient variety in terms of both teaching approaches and resources. In most lessons pupils learn well and work hard to develop their knowledge and understanding. They concentrate well and show good levels of maturity. The positive relationships in most lessons help to sustain pupils' interests and motivation.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good The curriculum is broad; it caters very well for the individual needs and interests of pupils and students. A good balance has been achieved between academic and vocational courses in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form. The range of opportunities in physical education and languages is exceptionally good. An extensive programme of extra-curricular activities promotes students' personal development. Participation rates in these activities are high.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Satisfactory. Pupils are supported well; they make good progress. The targets for students are reviewed appropriately; these procedures help to monitor progress effectively.

Aspect	Comment
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. Provision for moral, social and cultural development is good; whilst for spiritual development it is satisfactory. The personal, social and health education programme and extra-curricular activities promote opportunities for personal development. In general there is mutual respect between staff and students. The college makes an extensive provision for visits abroad and trips; these activities develop pupils' cultural awareness and understanding.
How well the college cares for its pupils	Good. Staff know pupils well and are efficient in carrying out the college's arrangements for pupils' welfare. Pastoral teams provide effective support and guidance for pupils. A recently introduced 'monitoring day' has created a successful link between home and college.

The college collects extensive data about the performance of individual students to identify appropriate targets. This information is used well to monitor students' progress. Training in child protection procedures is thorough and ongoing.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. The new principal has already begun the process of establishing clear priorities for the college's development. An efficient and hard-working senior management team is ably supporting him in this period of change. Many heads of department and pastoral leaders show good quality leadership and management.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. Governors are supportive and have a strong commitment to the well-being of the college. They have a good understanding of the college's strengths and weaknesses. They have worked hard on such issues as achieving Language College status and improving facilities. Communication between the governors and the college is open and productive.
The college's evaluation of its performance	Good. The college has established appropriate strategies for quality assurance procedures. The review and monitoring methods effectively identify both strengths and areas for development. The college recognises that the follow-up of reviews is insufficiently rigorous, and is working hard to achieve this.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Financial planning and control are very efficient. The college's resources are mostly used well, however, there are uneconomic courses in the sixth form. The teaching and non-teaching staff are effectively deployed.

The college's development plan clearly identifies priorities for improvement. Parents are very positive about the college; staff work hard to establish good links with parents.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE COLLEGE

What parents like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Their children enjoy coming to the college.• Pupils are expected to work hard; they make good progress.• The approachability and general responsiveness of staff.• The overall quality of teaching is good.• The college cares for their children and helps them to become mature and responsible.• The wide selection of extra-curricular activities and trips provides a rich educational experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Homework is not consistently set.

Inspectors agree with the parents' positive views about the college's standards and ethos. The variety of extra-curricular activities, including the commitment to the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, is outstanding. Inspectors agree that a significant minority of parents have justifiable concerns about the inconsistent levels of homework being set by different subjects.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form comprises 197 students. It is about average size and similar in number to that of the last inspection in 1997. There are approximately equal numbers of boys and girls on roll in Years 12 and 13. Fewer students than is typical come from minority ethnic backgrounds, but in similar proportion to that of the main college. The number of students eligible for free meals is well below average. The number of students who continue into the sixth form is about average; there are nine students with special educational needs. Most students follow AS and A-level courses. An increasing number of students take advanced vocational (AVCE) or intermediate vocational (GNVQ) courses. The curriculum is further enhanced by the provision of key skills courses and a mandatory language (Russian, Spanish or Chinese) in Year 12 and general studies in Year 13. The college has an open entry policy that allows students to study AS and A-level courses if they have a GCSE grade C in that subject.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form is successful and examination results are good overall. It meets students' needs well. Students achieve well; they make good use of the opportunities that are provided. Relationships are good and students show mature attitudes. Teaching is good overall; some is very good, ensuring that students learn well and are motivated. Leadership and management are satisfactory and day-to-day administration is efficient. The sixth form is financially self-sufficient, but some courses are not cost-effective because there are too few students following these courses. Overall, the college provides a broad and enriching quality of education.

Strengths

- Students achieve above average standards.
- Teaching is good overall, enabling students to make good progress.
- Students have very positive attitudes, which are conducive to effective learning.
- The care and support of students are good.
- The provision of extra-curricular activities is excellent.

What could be improved

- Attainment in the higher grades of A-level examinations in some subjects.
- The provision for private study.
- Funding of some courses to make them cost-effective.
- Religious education so that statutory requirements are met.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan. Strengths and areas for improvement in individual subjects are identified in the sections on individual subjects in the full report.

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

The table below shows overall judgements about the provision in the subjects and courses that were inspected in the sixth form. Judgements are based mainly on the quality of teaching and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects in the sixth form were inspected.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision
Mathematics	Good. The quality of teaching is good and management is effective. GCE A-level results in 2002 were good and are improving.
Biology	Good. A-level standards have been significantly higher than in other subjects in recent years. Standards in Year 13 are above average. Teaching is good.
Design and technology	Satisfactory. A-level results have varied over a period of years, but were in line with the college average in 2002. The quality of teaching is good. Relationships are good.
Business education	Good. A-level results have been at the national average over the past three years, although too few students have attained the highest grades.
ICT	Very good. Results in AVCE courses in 2002 were well above the national average. Teaching is good. Relationships are good. Curriculum organisation and assessment procedures assist independent learning.
History	Good. GCE A-level results have been in line with the national average in recent years. Students' response is very good and they achieve well. Leadership and management are good.
English	Good. Standards are at the national average and students achieve well. The quality of teaching is generally good and enables students to make good progress. Strong leadership is driving up standards.
Modern foreign languages	Good. Teaching and learning are good. Standards are in line with the national average. The breadth and diversity of the curriculum are strengths.
Physical education	Excellent. Teaching and learning are of the highest standards. Standards are very good overall. Leadership and management and relationships with the students are excellent.

Work was sampled in other subjects. Teaching was good in geography, religious education and general studies. In chemistry and physics results were below average in 2001, but standards rose significantly in 2002 and were higher than predicted grades.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Students benefit from good personal support and guidance. They are all treated as individuals and tutors know them well. The college provides clear information to help students to choose courses. Students' progress is closely monitored and they are aware of the standards that they are achieving towards their target grades. Provision for the development of key skills and careers advice and guidance are good.

Aspect	Comment
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Satisfactory. Assessment data is well used to monitor individual progress. This leads to prompt, effective action to improve standards when necessary. The college ensures that students have equal access to courses and enables students with a wide range of attainment to achieve well. Priorities need to be more precisely identified in the development plan to ensure the viability of courses.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers are accessible to help them to overcome difficulties with their work. Assessment is informative. Courses are available that suit their talents and aspirations. The range of extra-curricular activities is extensive. Teaching is effective and challenges them to do well. They are given clear, helpful information about the choice of sixth form courses. There are good links with higher education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They would like the college to listen and respond to their views more. The accommodation for private study is poor. The recently introduced scheme for monitoring attendance.

There were 78 returns to the students' questionnaire. Twenty-two students were interviewed during the inspection. Their views on the sixth form were positive overall and reflect the outcomes of the questionnaire. Year 12 students were of the opinion that they had been given good guidance before entering the sixth form and that they had adapted readily to the different styles of teaching and learning. They said that their subject choices had very largely been met. They believe that the college responds very well if they have any personal problems.

Inspectors fully agree with students' positive views. They also agree that students do not have sufficient opportunity to express their views formally.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Inspectors make judgements about provision in subjects and courses, and about leadership and management, in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor and very poor. Excellent and very good are equivalent to the judgement 'outstanding' in further education and sixth form college reports; poor and very poor are equivalent to 'very weak'.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Pupils' general level of attainment on entry to the college is below average. The attainment of boys does not differ significantly from that of the girls.
2. By the end of Year 9, in 2002, pupils achieved results in National Curriculum tests in English that were in line with the national average, but were well above the performance of pupils from similar backgrounds. In mathematics and science results were well below average, but in line with expectations relative to similar colleges. The overall performance of pupils in the core subjects was above average in comparison with similar colleges. However, the trend in recent results is lower than that found nationally. Generally pupils did not achieve as well in mathematics and science as their prior attainment indicates. Attainment in mathematics was particularly low.
3. Standards attained at the end Year 9, in most subjects, are those typically expected for their age; attainment in lessons is above average in physical education. However, the standards shown in science, geography, music and religious education are not as strong. Achievement in mathematics is now significantly better. When considering pupils' prior attainment levels, their overall achievement through Years 7 to 9 is generally good.
4. Overall, results in the last three years for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) have been broadly the same as the national average and well above the performance of similar schools. Results in the higher grades are similar to those of the previous inspection; the overall trend is in line with the national picture. Results for higher attaining pupils represent good progress given the standards that these pupils had attained at the end of Year 9. In the broader category A* to G the attainment of pupils was well above the national average. Average and lower attaining pupils made relatively good progress. Examination performance was above average in art and design, design and technology German, physical education and vocational subjects. Standards of attainment in English, mathematics and geography were not as high as they should have been given the ability of some pupils. The difference between the attainment of boys and girls is similar to that found nationally.
5. Overall, standards of attainment for pupils in Years 10 and 11 are close to the national average. However, there is a degree of variability between subjects; this reflects the broader range of ability in Years 10 and 11. Attainment is above average in physical education and art and design. Standards are in line with national averages in design and technology, ICT, modern languages and religious education, but below average for all other subjects. Achievement in mathematics, art and design, design and technology ICT, modern foreign languages and music is good, but it is unsatisfactory in geography. Achievement is very good in physical education. In Years 10 and 11 overall achievement is good. The progress being shown by pupils in some subjects results from the emphasis that has been given to improving standards of teaching and the quality of learning.
6. The college did not meet its 2002 target for the higher GCSE grades by two per cent although they were achieved for the broader grade range. The target for 2003 of 43 per cent in the higher grades is realistic, but possibly not sufficiently challenging.

7. Pupils' literacy skills are below average by the end of Year 11. Over time, pupils achieve satisfactorily because below average literacy skills adversely affected their learning when they entered the college in Year 7. An emphasis on improving literacy is a feature of the learning in most subjects. This has been effective in raising standards in Years 7 to 9 and is emerging as a strength for pupils in Years 10 and 11. The catch-up programme for pupils at Level 3 in English when they enter the college raises the standards of pupils quickly and effectively. Most subjects take the teaching of basic literacy skills seriously and, consequently, so do the pupils. Through the use of writing frames, glossaries and study aids, pupils gradually make improvements to their spelling, reading and writing skills, particularly in Years 7 to 9.
8. A range of texts, in all subjects, encourages the use of technical and specialist vocabulary. In modern foreign languages, art and design, English and geography, pupils use technical language to good effect. Skills are less secure in mathematics and science. Standards in essay writing are very good in geography and good in history, but generally, pupils' extended writing requires development in most subjects. The library supports all subjects by stocking specialised texts and multimedia materials. Library induction courses are effective in teaching information and retrieval skills because of good teaching and planning. The English department has dictionaries and thesauruses available in each classroom; key words are displayed prominently in most subject classrooms to familiarise pupils with specialist vocabulary. The provision of dictionaries in all subjects would further enhance learning. Carefully censored Internet access allows pupils to research topics in detail.
9. There is no whole-college policy to co-ordinate the learning of mathematical ideas in subjects but the numeracy co-ordinator has started to work with the LEA co-ordinator to formulate a policy. However, pupils are improving their skills in calculation and show satisfactory mental ability. Some mathematical skills are evident in other subjects. For example, graphs and charts are used in science, physical education, English, geography and design and technology; calculations are part of science, English and physical education lessons. The ideas of scale are developed in art and design and design and technology.
10. Overall, pupils with special educational needs achieve well and make good progress over time. Pupils with different levels of special educational needs gained eight GCSE passes. One visually impaired pupil and one hearing impaired pupil both gained eight grades A-C in the GCSE examinations.
11. In lessons seen the progress pupils with special educational needs in Years 7 to 11 make in the majority of subjects is at least as expected in all subjects. Pupils achieve better than expected in English, design and technology, modern foreign languages and religious education, and history in Years 7 to 9. They make very good progress in physical education and Latin. Where pupils' special educational needs are well met, teachers are well informed about them, and teaching assistants provide appropriate support.

Sixth form

12. In the GCE A/AS-level results for 2001, the average points score for boys was close to the national average, but the score for girls was below average. The national data have not yet been published for 2002, but given the college's performance with regard to A-B grades (35 per cent), results are likely to at least match the national average, which would be in line with the results of the previous inspection. There was a degree of variation between subjects in respect of A-B grades. The best levels of performance

were in mathematics, physics and health and social care, although these subjects tended to have smaller entries than other subjects.

13. In 2002, the A-E grade A-level results were well above the national average in ICT and above average in biology, mathematics and physical education. For most other subjects standards were broadly average.
14. Results in the AS-level examinations in 2002 were encouraging and indicate standards that are at least in line with national averages. In these examinations students achieved well in mathematics, physical education and religious education.
15. In lessons, attainment is above average in art and design, biology, ICT and music; it is well above average in sports studies. In all other subjects standards are in line with national averages. Given the relatively low prior attainment criteria for entry into the sixth form the achievement of most students is good. Students with special educational needs in the sixth form also make good progress.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

16. Pupils' attitudes towards college and their work, behaviour and personal development are all good. The college's work on pupils' personal development combined with the effective links with parents makes important contributions to their positive attitudes. The good standards prevailing at the time of the previous inspection have been broadly maintained. Overall the attitudes of pupils with special educational needs are good. Throughout the college, pupils with special educational needs show positive attitudes to learning.
17. Pupils' attitudes to college are good overall. Based on questionnaire returns, most pupils like college. In the discussions pupils and students from all year groups indicate a good level of satisfaction with what is provided. Pupils are positive about the help they get and the fair and friendly way in which they are treated by most staff. They are also positive about the wide range of extra-curricular activities, especially the sporting opportunities and the ready availability of computers. Teaching styles in some lessons, consistency in homework levels and the state of the toilets are the main areas that need improvement, in their opinion. Take-up of the wide range of extra-curricular activities, especially, sport and music, is very good. In the majority of lessons observed in Years 7 to 11, pupils' attitudes were good. In these lessons, most pupils listened sensibly and showed good levels of interest, concentration and determination to complete set tasks. Most pupils' favourite subjects and lessons are those where they are practically involved, such as in physical education, design and technology, art and design and working with computers. The best attitudes and behaviour occur in lessons where the teachers' expectations are high, work is demanding and pupils are busy and engaged in a variety of practical activities, which provide the right level of challenge for them. In many of the lessons that they currently do not enjoy, pupils justifiably speak of wanting more opportunities for oral and practical work and less copying from the board. Most pupils with special educational needs are positive about the extra support they get.
18. Behaviour is good overall. Throughout the day nearly all pupils behave sensibly. In corridors, at break time, lunchtime and between lessons a general calm and orderly atmosphere prevails. Among a small minority of pupils, mostly boys, there is occasional jostling, although this is rarely malicious. In a few lessons, especially in the lower sets in Years 8 to 10, inattentive and sometimes disruptive behaviour is a feature. This is often caused by pupils whose special educational needs relate to emotional and

behavioural difficulties. Pupils in all year groups indicate that most get on well; incidents of racism are very rare and well handled when reported to staff. Whilst there is some bullying, especially in Years 8 and 9, incidents are taken seriously by staff and usually resolved effectively. Most pupils take good care of property and resources. However, there is some litter and graffiti and a small minority occasionally cause damage to toilets and light diffusers, for example. In the previous college year, the level of fixed-term exclusions was broadly in line with the national average, whilst the level of permanent exclusions is below the national average. During the week of the inspection, five pupils were absent due to fixed-term exclusions. Parents' questionnaire responses reflect this generally positive picture in relation to pupils' behaviour.

19. Relationships between adults and pupils and among pupils are good overall. Most adults act as good role models. Most teachers value pupils' work and effectively praise effort and good work. For example, pupils in all year groups mention the positive support provided by teachers and the fair way in which they are treated as a key reason why they like college. As a result, the majority of pupils are comfortable expressing views and asking questions of their teachers, for example. This assists their learning. Good relationships among most pupils, including those with special educational needs, are a positive feature. As a result, in lessons the majority of pupils work well in pairs and small groups by supporting each other's learning with explanations, for example. Nevertheless, in a small minority of lessons the distracting behaviour of a small minority of pupils, mostly boys, reduces the overall quality of relationships between adults and pupils and among pupils.
20. Pupils' personal development is good overall. Most pupils routinely show responsibility and thought for others. Most are comfortable speaking with visitors. When questioned in groups, most pupils are comfortable expressing their viewpoint, and listen with respect to different views expressed by others. Their views are clear and show insight on both the things they like and the things they would change in the college. Most pupils show concern for others, if they are ill or otherwise upset. The year councils, comprising two pupils from each form, are generally making an effective contribution in each year group. The impact of the college council, comprising two pupils from each year group is currently limited, however. Sixth form pupils support pupils in Year 7, who experience difficulties with reading. However, across year groups, lesson observations confirm that there is a small minority of pupils who disrupt the learning of others and are mindless about the consequences of the impact of their actions on others. Whilst in a few subjects, especially physical education and vocational subjects, pupils comfortably make choices in their learning; this feature is less developed in most subjects than usually seen.
21. Attendance is unsatisfactory overall. At around 90 per cent in each of the previous three years, it is below the national average. Whilst the majority attend at good rates, there is a significant minority with unsatisfactory attendance, particularly in Years 10 and 11. The unauthorised absence level, at 1.4 per cent, for the most recent year, is above the national average.
22. Punctuality is satisfactory overall. Most pupils come to college on time and get to nearly all lessons promptly during the day. There is no significant level of internal or external truancy, due in significant part to the effective practices of taking a register in each lesson and first day of absence response by the college, in cases of suspected truancy.

Sixth form

23. Students' attitudes to college are very good overall. This is reflected in very positive attitudes to their work in most Years 12 and 13 lessons. Student attendance is unsatisfactory, however. Observations during the inspection indicate that there is an issue around the punctuality of some students.
24. Students' personal development and relationships are very good overall. Students interviewed during the inspection were articulate and measured in their judgements about the college. Relationships between staff and students and among students are very good. The development of students' personal and learning skills is satisfactory overall, but good among the students following vocational courses.
25. Students are positive with what the college provides, based on the student questionnaire returns, student interviews and subject discussions during the inspection.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

26. Both teaching and pupils' learning are good. In 96 per cent of the lessons seen teaching was satisfactory or better, in two-thirds of lessons it was good or better. In almost one quarter of lessons the quality of teaching was at least very good; a few were excellent. Learning follows a similar pattern and enables pupils to achieve well. Teaching was unsatisfactory in four per cent of lessons.
27. The overall quality of teaching in English, mathematics and science is good. There are examples of very good teaching in English, art and design, history, music, religious education, ICT and physical education. These lessons were characterised by teachers' high expectations of what pupils can achieve, very good management techniques and highly effective teaching methods. In the few unsatisfactory lessons seen, lack of pace and challenge and insufficient variety in teaching approaches were the main causes. However, teaching overall is better than at the last inspection when there was less very good teaching.
28. Pupils make good gains in knowledge because teachers use their subject knowledge and understanding effectively in organising and presenting work. In a Year 9 dance lesson on 'jazz', this expertise enabled the teacher to plan an effective lesson, which developed pupils' skills, understanding and confidence. Her great enthusiasm also rubs off on the pupils. In English the good support material provided gives pupils a range of key words and terms to promote their learning. In a Year 9 history lesson, the teacher's background knowledge of societal influences of the Industrial Revolution provided a good context for pupils' learning. In music lessons staff have significant expertise, which is readily available to pupils – especially in relation to contemporary music. In physical education lessons the teachers' expertise enables them to give clear explanations and instructions so that pupils know what to do and how to improve. Pupils gain new skills and are challenged to improve them through planned, progressive activities.
29. Teachers plan to provide varied and challenging work to engage pupils' interest and to move them on in their learning. Pupils respond well to their teachers' care for their achievement and this helps to develop the good relationships evident in the department. In a Year 7 lesson on language, the pupils appreciated working to produce a structured, well-informed discussion. They appreciated how effective and rich our language is due to the influence of other European languages. In many lessons the effective use of

resources by teachers promotes understanding. This is particularly evident in the development of literacy skills.

30. Teachers assess work regularly and share with pupils the standards at which they are working. Teachers usually monitor progress carefully. Pupils who are not doing as well as they might are identified for extra help. Teachers regularly discuss with pupils the progress they are making and at the end of units of work set targets for improvement; the system is increasingly well used and appreciated by pupils. Some pupils are unsure or have insufficient knowledge about the levels at which they are working.
31. The range of activities and methods used by teachers is good. In English lessons, writing frames are used well to give pupils, particularly the lower attainers, help in structuring and developing their work. The appropriateness of tasks to match the ability of pupils is a feature of the best lessons. The variety in the activity and relevance to the ability level of the pupil enables them to remain on task and interested for the whole of the lesson. For example, in a lesson with a lower set in Year 9, the teacher made effective use of ICT animations to illustrate and compare light rays with water waves. This was then re-enforced with a good demonstration with a ripple tank. In ICT lessons, teachers use the Intranet well. The use of data projectors and interactive white boards is effective in helping pupils to understand processes, when they can see them clearly displayed.
32. Teachers generally manage their classes well. Relationships are good and a strength of the college. The ethos for learning in most lessons is purposeful, relaxed and friendly. Pupils' confidence in a Year 9 German lesson on 'words and culture' was enhanced, through clear lesson objectives and an orderly learning environment. Pupils bring good attitudes to lessons and they behave well on the whole. They persevere, try hard and work well individually and in groups.
33. Where teaching is less successful it often lacks adequate planning and there is too little variety of teaching strategies. On occasions teachers' expectations are too low. For example, In a Year 10 design and technology lesson the pupils' planning of the designing aspects lacked imagination and challenge. The teacher was over-directive and the focus of the lesson was directed towards the task at the expense of developing learning to the depth and breadth expected. Some geography lessons are over-reliant on worksheets and use too few examples to flesh out the schemes of work to create interest or lead towards independence in learning. They become mechanical and insufficiently challenging for pupils. In some religious education lessons there are not enough opportunities provided for pupils to debate their views with each other or tasks to show what they are learning about religions.
34. Overall, the teaching of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. In Years 7 to 11, in the majority of subjects pupils learn well. There is good management of pupils in all classes. All members of staff have been circulated with data on pupils who require intervention. The targets on individual education plans are not regularly used and monitored by teachers and teaching assistants to plan for lessons or to check pupils' progress and identify need and achievement. All pupils are organised into higher, middle and lower teaching groups. Most pupils with learning difficulties are grouped together in lower teaching groups with fewer numbers. In some subjects, in particular music, this limits the skills available to pupils when taking part in group work and performance. In music, geography, physical education, design and technology, modern foreign languages and religious education, and in history in Years 7 to 9, work is well matched to the needs of the pupils.

Sixth form

35. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Lessons are planned well. Teachers set appropriate tasks and activities to effectively build the students' knowledge and understanding of their subjects. Overall, students are positive about the quality of teaching they receive and appreciate teachers' accessibility and support when they have difficulty with their work.
36. Of the nine subjects chosen for inspection, the quality of teaching and learning is excellent in physical education and good in the remainder of the subjects seen. In some of the other lessons observed, teaching was good in art and design, geography and religious education.
37. Many of the good features evident in the main college are also present in sixth form teaching and learning. The greater maturity and willingness of students to contribute to lessons help the effectiveness of teaching. A strength of teaching is the good specialist subject knowledge of staff. These qualities are reflected in mathematics lessons, where work is challenging and students show willingness to share ideas and question what is taught. Other very good features of teaching that promote students' progress are high teacher expectations and the pace of the lesson. In many lessons, good questioning skills allowed teachers to draw the best from students and challenge their thinking.
38. Most teachers plan lessons and activities well. In biology lessons, fieldwork is undertaken to give students an opportunity for some extended study; for example, work has been produced on sand dunes and fresh water ecology. In ICT lessons teachers use their very good technical subject knowledge well and have a good understanding of examination requirements to give clear explanations to students. In physical education lessons on anatomy and physiology, the extensive preparation and range of teaching methods ensure that students make good progress.
39. Teachers are aware of the needs of students on the special educational needs register and take these into account when planning their lessons. Generally, good planning ensures that materials are suitably adapted to meet these students' needs and enable full participation in all lessons.
40. Some sixth form lessons are too teacher led and lack variety. Post-16 examination modules were taking place during the inspection week and therefore some lessons were revision ones. In biology lessons the range of teaching approaches is at present somewhat narrow. There is too little independent work, research, small group discussion and use of student presentations.

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

41. The quality and range of learning opportunities are good. The college provides a curriculum which meets pupils' and students' needs throughout their time in college. A good balance has been achieved between academic and vocational courses in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, ensuring a choice of courses that suit aspirations and attainment levels, as well as preparing students well for further education and employment. An exceptional programme of extra-curricular activities, enrichment and support, very well supports the formal taught curriculum, which includes outstanding provision for physical education and modern foreign languages.

42. In geography in particular, difficulties arise because of the different time allocation between bands, but other subjects also find the current banding arrangements a significant constraint to learning outcomes. In design and technology, the dual award GCSE course in engineering has to manage with a similar time allocation to that given to single GCSE courses. The number of periods allocated in the curriculum plan affects the balance of the curriculum in a number of subjects in Years 10 and 11. These are equal opportunity matters, which the college recognises and plans to address through the more flexible two-week timetable operating from September 2003.
43. The National Literacy Strategy has been successfully introduced in Year 7. Most subject areas provide good opportunities for pupils to develop basic skills. The focus on basic literacy skills in Year 7 English is good, and opportunities for pupils in all years to develop speaking and listening skills are good. There are regular opportunities for extended writing and note taking in history, English and geography. There are well-planned curriculum opportunities for pupils with special educational needs.
44. There is no whole-college policy to assist other curricular areas or co-ordinate mathematical ideas. One is planned and in-service training has started. The mathematics department has responded with enthusiasm to the introduction of the National Numeracy Strategy, which has begun to assist in raising standards. The planned Programme of Study for Years 7 to 9 has been comprehensively revised to follow the national guidelines.
45. Good use of computers in many subjects helps pupils to present their work to advantage and broaden its range. In mathematics, pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 learn how to use spreadsheets. In English, pupils in Year 9 learn how to present their work using 'PowerPoint', and in modern foreign languages pupils in all years are beginning to use the new multimedia suite and interactive white boards.
46. Provision for personal, social and health education is good overall. It is well co-ordinated and delivered primarily by a mixture of religious education department staff and senior members of the pastoral team. As a result, it is well linked and responsive to pupils' needs. Careers, drugs and sex education form central parts of each year's provision. The lessons seen were of good quality overall, although there was significant variation.
47. The college has been awarded Sportsmark, Artsmark and Language College status, which identifies it as a centre of excellence for physical education, the visual arts, art and design and modern foreign languages. The college works to ensure equality of access and opportunity to all pupils, and almost all the site has now been adapted for wheelchair access. The college still does not meet statutory requirements for religious education in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, neither does it meet statutory requirements for citizenship. Opportunities for extension work for gifted pupils are being developed with the appointment of new co-ordinator for this area of the colleges' activities.
48. The overall curriculum for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. The range of needs of the present pupils includes those affecting communication and interaction, cognition and learning, behaviour and emotional development, and sensory, physical and medical needs. Support is provided in class and through withdrawal classes. Extra reading also happens before the start of the college day and during registration. Since the previous inspection the college has introduced the ASDAN and Duke of Edinburgh alternative examination provision for some pupils with special

educational needs. In geography the exam course on offer is too difficult for some pupils. The whole-college responsibility for special educational needs is well reflected in the regular meetings between the subject representatives, the special educational needs governor and the special educational needs co-ordinator in which they share information and develop an understanding of the use of data. In all lessons, pupils take their lead from the teacher and accept prompting and support. Pupils listen to each other well.

49. The contribution of the community to pupils' learning is good overall. These links are particularly important for pupils taking primarily vocational courses. For example, the local education business partnership, contributes to business studies, leisure and tourism and the health and social care course benefits from links with 'Age Concern'. The linkage between the thriving Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme and ASDAN (Award Scheme Development Accreditation Network) is an imaginative and effective way of ensuring positive inclusion of all Year 11 pupils. The health and fitness day, organised with the help of St Helens Rugby League club, benefits all Year 7 pupils.
50. Overall, the college makes good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC). Provision for moral, social and cultural development is good, whilst for spiritual development it is satisfactory. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme is an important part of the college's provision for SMSC. The religious education syllabus provides good opportunities in these areas, and there are valuable examples of opportunities for reflection and discussion of spiritual and moral issues.
51. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory overall. Assemblies take place twice each week, for each year group, making a satisfactory contribution, with the 'thought for the week' being a positive feature. There is some evidence of planning in subject departments for spiritual development, but this is inconsistent and lacks structure. The PSHE programme contributes well in this area, by providing opportunities for pupils to develop attitudes, explore feelings and develop insights and self-awareness. In some subjects, opportunities for the spiritual development of pupils were observed. For example, the religious education curriculum makes a good contribution. Pupils are encouraged to consider and respond to questions about the meaning and purpose of life. In English, pupils are exposed to a range of literary works. They reflected on issues of life and death. In art and design and design, pupils are required to draw upon their own attitudes, values, beliefs and experiences of the world as source material for their work. However, opportunities to enhance this aspect of pupils' personal development are missed in most subjects.
52. Provision for moral development is good. Opportunities are targeted largely through the PSHE programme. Topics such as attitudes to bullying, sex education, drugs awareness, values and family life and equal opportunities, all provide a good curriculum for discussion and the development of attitudes and values. Teaching styles that allow pupils to express their views, explore moral dilemmas and make judgements were evident in both PSHE and religious education. The college has clear expectations of pupils knowing right from wrong. Pupils accept teachers' instructions, including the 'consequences' in most cases. Religious education lessons contribute very well to pupils' moral development. For example, in these lessons pupils regularly discuss issues seriously and are comfortable contributing their own experiences. Several other subjects such as art and design and design, design and technology, physical education, modern foreign languages and music also contribute well.

53. Provision for pupils' social development is good overall. Pupils in all year groups benefit from the well-planned PSHE programme. Most subjects make a good contribution. Whilst currently not operating routinely across all year groups, the elected college and year councils provide pupils with effective opportunities to engage in the democratic process. The elected representatives gain experience of community leadership and responsibility. Residential and other visits, college productions, a very wide range of sporting competitions and visitors provide pupils with a wide range of links with the wider community.
54. Provision for pupils' cultural development is good. The very wide range of modern foreign languages, including Russian and Chinese, and the wide range of sporting competitions, led by rugby league, make very good contributions. Art and design strongly promotes pupils' multicultural understanding of African, Oriental, Indian, South Pacific and aboriginal cultures, for example. The college's curriculum in PSHE provides good opportunities. For example, topics such as individual differences, stereotyping and prejudice are well represented. The geography department has organised a UNICEF day and made arrangements for penpals in Brazil. There are aspects of religious education that make a significant contribution, especially in terms of the study of different religions and the cultures that support them. The wide range of well-supported trips and visits to theatres, art galleries, museums and local music festivals, together with the significant number of international visits, all provide opportunities for pupils to develop cultural awareness.

Sixth form

55. The quality and range of learning opportunities in the sixth form are good. A wide range of academic and vocational courses is offered, which gives breadth and relevance to the curriculum. In its attempts to meet the aspirations of all sixth form students, the college is currently operating 14 teaching groups in Year 13 with less than six students, and four of a similar size in Year 12. The college recognises that this is not cost-effective and cannot be continued. As a result, a number of strategies are being considered for next September, which may include additional links with partner institutions, as well as video conferencing combined sets at AS level and self-supported study schemes. Provision for extra-curricular opportunities and enrichment in the sixth form are excellent. As a result of its specialist Language College status, a foreign language module, offering Russian, Chinese and Spanish is taken by nearly all sixth form students. Sporting facilities and the opportunities to participate in a wide range of sports, at local and national levels, are outstanding.

HOW WELL DOES THE COLLEGE CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

56. Both pastoral and academic support for pupils is now good overall. Both elements are well integrated and monitored by the experienced pastoral team. The academic monitoring procedures are now effective, but key messages arising from the data need to be more readily accessible and routinely used by subject teachers to guide their planning and promote good progress consistently.
57. Procedures to promote and ensure pupils' well-being are good. The college has good arrangements for induction to Year 7 and other classes. Transfer arrangements into Years 10 and 12 are well established and appropriate. The additional support provided, as part of 'Excellence in Cities', is having a very positive impact in terms of inclusion of pupils with difficulties ranging from behaviour, absence and underachievement to social and emotional problems. There are effective links and involvement with social and health services. Child protection procedures and those for looked-after pupils are

good. The procedures and the designated staff member are known by adults in the college. Pupils are made appropriately aware of this issue as part of their personal and social education. Pupils confirm that they are very well cared for when they are ill or otherwise distressed and would feel comfortable approaching adults in relation to any personal problems.

58. Procedures to ensure pupils' health and safety are good overall. Teachers make pupils aware of health and safety issues in lessons; for example, in design and technology, physical education, science and in information and communication technology in relation to e-mails and use of the Internet. An important emphasis is placed on pupils taking responsibility for the safety of themselves and others in the PSHE curriculum. This effectively contributes to the development of a safety conscious attitude among them. Health and safety forms an important and a growing part of the governing body's deliberations. Fire alarm testing and the inspection of portable electrical equipment are routinely carried out. Fire drills are carried out regularly. First-aid arrangements are well established and appropriate. Nevertheless, additional risk assessments are needed in the science department.
59. Despite the below average attendance, procedures to monitor and improve attendance are good overall. The processing of the raw attendance data is rapid and effective, making first day of absence a routine feature. The impact of this is less than sometimes seen due to difficulties in contacting a minority of parents. Attendance data, by form, is routinely plotted and publicly displayed. Regular reviews are held to discuss measures to address the needs of pupils with significant levels of absence. Measures to recognise high attendance are frequent. There is a significant amount of data analysis. However, this work has not yet examined the attendance levels of different groups, such as different sets in key subjects, to provide further insights into areas for development in curriculum and other provision.
60. Procedures to monitor and promote good behaviour and discipline are very good overall. The positive behaviour policy, classroom expectations and associated commendation systems provide a coherent basis for pupils' behaviour, discipline and personal development. The main emphasis is on recognising and rewarding good behaviour, and most pupils respond positively. Contact with parents, recognising good behaviour, appearance and attitudes are a routine and very positive feature.
61. Procedures for monitoring and eliminating oppressive behaviour, including bullying, are very good overall. There is a clear-stages set of sanctions, in relation to unacceptable behaviour in lessons and outside. Parents are effectively involved where concerns arise. Clearly-defined referral routes are in place. For example, the work of the Social Inclusion unit, funded through Social Inclusion, now plays a very important role in providing some pupils with a range of strategies to deal with feelings, including anger, communication difficulties with their peer group and learning from mistakes. This work is reducing fixed-term exclusion levels. Pupils confirm that the 'Anti-bullying Week' and the annual bullying survey, organised as part of PSHE, have a positive impact in preventing bullying. They also confirm that the measures taken to resolve incidents of bullying, racism or other antisocial behaviour are usually very effective. Reporting arrangements for racist incidents are satisfactory.

62. Where they provide support, teaching assistants were seen to be effective, and they keep daily records that are monitored regularly. There are, however, insufficient numbers of teaching assistants within the lower teaching groups to provide the necessary support as teaching assistants help with the National Literacy Strategy Progress Units. The college has recognised the need to improve skills in reading and writing for lower attaining pupils. Teaching assistants have a dual role as first-aiders and this was observed to affect adversely the pupils with special educational needs who were expecting support when first-aiders were delayed for lessons, and this is unsatisfactory.
63. The attendance of all pupils on the special educational needs register is monitored through the pastoral system, subject teachers, teaching assistants and the special educational needs co-ordinator, and noted if a concern. As this does affect the achievement of some pupils with special educational needs, appropriate steps are being taken to follow this up through contact with parents and the education welfare officer.
64. Seven visually impaired pupils have their own specialist support unit on site, which provides excellent support by preparing their work in advance in co-operation with teachers, and providing specialist help and equipment in the classroom. Teachers and teaching assistants relate well to pupils.
65. Procedures to monitor and support pupils' personal development are very good. The monitoring system systematically recognises good attitudes to work. This recognition and reward provides pupils with frequent and public confirmation of what is good in their lives and helps to raise their self-esteem. The new 'monitoring day' in the autumn term, when the form tutor meets with each pupil and their parents, is proving effective. Targets are identified and reviewed and areas for improvement in attitudes as well as subjects are agreed. Pupils' annual reports place an important emphasis on personal development by explicitly assessing performance in relation to effort, organisation, motivation, presentation, behaviour and punctuality. The assembly programme, together with the PSHE, provision gives pupils many opportunities to reflect on the lives and needs of themselves and others. Pupils often contribute to assemblies, by reading their poems, for example. The year councils provide pupils with regular opportunities to raise and help address a wide variety of issues. The college provides an exceptional range of sporting opportunities as well as musical and wider community events. The thriving Duke of Edinburgh Award programme provides very good opportunities for pupils and students in Years 10 to 13.
66. Procedures for assessing and monitoring pupils' attainment and progress are good. The results, including raw scores of pupils' attainment before entry, are collected and used to assist in setting the year into ten ability sets and three bands. Each subject produces a specific marking policy in line with the overall college policy on assessment. At three times during the year every pupils' attainment and effort are used in a common grading system. These are recorded on a database so that a comprehensive record is compiled over time. The procedures for monitoring and supporting academic progress are very good. Assessment data is sent to heads of departments for their subjects and to heads of year for an overview of the progress of the pupils in that year. The data is analysed well and used to monitor pupils' achievement and for setting realistic targets for their attainment. The pupils' progress is constantly checked, and underachieving pupils are monitored by guidance tutors and form tutors. The system is constantly reviewed.

67. The pupils' work is regularly marked and the assessment policy put into practice by all departments with little difference in procedures for Years 7 to 9 and 10 and 11. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 in ICT can access their assessment record directly from the departmental database. Regular testing occurs which is, in the main, detailed and diagnostic. The use of assessment information to guide curricular planning is satisfactory enabling Programmes of Study to respond to the results of external examinations.
68. Assessment of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. The needs of pupils across a range of learning, behaviour, social, medical and physical needs are understood and identified appropriately. Annual reviews for pupils with special educational needs are carried out as required. In lessons, teaching assistants and subject teachers do not relate their own records of any significant progress by pupils to the targets on individual education plans. The special educational needs central register is useful and circulated to all staff, but does not contain sufficient information about the achievement of pupils on the register. New software is being used appropriately for writing individual education plans. Administration of the SEN provision is hindered because the computer used was stolen and the one currently used has limited capability

Sixth form

69. Procedures to monitor and support students' attendance are satisfactory. A significant minority of students get financial support, in the form of an Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA), provided their attendance is good. This has a positive impact on these students' attendance. Individual's attendance and punctuality are appropriately monitored by form tutors and teaching staff. Follow-ups are held where this information indicates that there are issues.
70. The quality and accessibility of information, advice and guidance given to students are satisfactory overall. Pupils in Year 11 are made appropriately aware of the entry requirements for intermediate, advanced GNVQ and AS courses. Sixth form induction is satisfactory, although limited but there are plans to make it more extensive and effective. Progress reviews are regular. Following examination results at the end of Year 12, discussions and realistic guidance are significant features.
71. The careers education and guidance for future courses and career opportunities are satisfactory overall. A significant amount of careers guidance and work contacts are provided, especially for the intermediate and advanced GNVQ students. With the belated, but now effective, support of the new 'Connexions' service, the plan is that all Year 13 students and some in Year 12 will have had a careers interview before the end of the college year. Appropriate support is provided, primarily by the head of sixth form and the higher education co-ordinator with the preparation of personal statements for university entrance. Appropriate software and literature are available to support students with their decisions about choice of higher education institutions.
72. Assessment in the sixth form is good with detailed records stored and students kept informed about their progress and predicted grades. In this way, students are made aware of their strengths and weaknesses.

HOW WELL DOES THE COLLEGE WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

73. Overall, the partnership with parents makes a good contribution to the quality of education provided and the standards achieved. College works hard and largely effectively at informing and involving parents. Most parents deliver on their key responsibilities of getting pupils to attend college regularly, and support pupils' progress by attending progress reviews.
74. Parents' views, as expressed mainly through the parents' questionnaire sent out before the inspection, are positive about what the college provides and achieves. Around 11 per cent of parents replied to the questionnaire and six attended the pre-inspection meeting. Inspection evidence broadly supports parents' positive views and one of their main concerns. Most parents consider that their children like college, make good progress and are expected to work hard. They value the approachability and general responsiveness of staff. Most are justifiably positive about the teaching and the information they get on pupils' progress. They are justifiably very positive about the opportunities outside lessons and college's part in helping pupils to become mature and responsible. However, a significant minority have justifiable concerns about the inconsistent levels of homework because of the variation in the amounts being set by different subjects.
75. Links with parents make a good contribution to pupils' learning. Staff are approachable and generally responsive to parents' concerns. Pupils' homework planners, enable effective, routine two-way communication between college and home. The quality of information to support pupils' progress, including pupils' annual reports, is good overall. There are termly updates on progress, through the new 'Monitoring Day', conventional parents' evenings and the written annual reports. The pupils' annual reports are of good quality. Current performance and target grades, together with areas for improvement in attitudes, are effectively shared with parents. Identification of key areas for improvement in subjects is not a strong feature, however. Regular newsletters, together with other letters and notes, keep parents very well informed on ongoing college life. The prospectus gives a clear outline of the college's expectations and character. The governors' annual report clearly informs parents on the work of governors.
76. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are consulted regularly and take part in regular and annual reviews. Any letters are followed up appropriately.
77. Parents' involvement with the work of the college makes a good contribution to pupils' learning and the life of the college. Most parents respond positively to individual requests to discuss issues, such as their child's progress, behaviour and attendance. Parental attendance is now satisfactory at the new 'Monitoring Day' and this is an important improvement. Parental meetings on Year 6 induction, Year 7 settling-in, Year 9 options, Year 11 coursework and higher education for sixth form students are generally well attended. A range of productions and two presentation evenings on sport and other achievements are well attended and regarded. A small group of enthusiastic parents in the Friends of Cowley (FOC) make a valued contribution through fund-raising and social events. However, a minority of parents do not deliver on their key responsibility of ensuring that pupils attend college. This is reflected in the below average attendance. The level of unauthorised absence reflects the unwillingness of a small number of parents to support the college by providing reasons for pupils' absence.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

78. The quality of leadership and management of key staff in the college is good. Since the previous inspection good progress has been made on the key issues that were identified at that time. Standards in Years 10 and 11 have improved to now being well above similar schools, but attainment in National Curriculum tests has not risen as fast as nationally. The college has introduced far more rigorous target setting and monitoring procedures to focus on improving standards. An appropriate emphasis has been given to literacy, but there are inadequate strategies for the implementation of numeracy and citizenship.
79. The senior management team effectively promotes the aims and values of the college. The new principal had been in post less than a week at the time of the inspection. However, in discussion and through the minutes of staff meetings it is evident that he has already established priorities and objectives for the college's development. A significant proportion of the current improvement plan was produced through the hard work of the vice-principal. The new senior management team works through an open style of management that has created a good team ethos. This spirit of co-operation amongst the staff is a strong and positive feature of the college. Members of the management team have appropriate responsibilities, but the balance of these responsibilities needs to be reviewed. Together with the governing body there is an evident commitment to improvement. Leadership is mostly collaborative, recognising the value of consultation.
80. The overall quality of leadership at middle management is good. It is excellent in physical education and very good in mathematics, art and design, ICT and modern foreign languages. Management is good in other areas of the curriculum, apart from design and technology where it is satisfactory. The departmental management needs to be rationalised to ensure greater co-ordination between respective areas. The quality of documentation in departments is generally good.
81. Heads of year are effective and, along with their teams, help promote the aims and values of the college. They are appropriately involved in academic and pastoral issues and act as a direct link between home and college and between the college and outside agencies. The pastoral teams have a sound overview of the progress of groups of pupils and their subsequent levels of learning.
82. Developments are implemented, managed, monitored and evaluated efficiently. The good quality of these management practices is reflected in the successful outcome of Language College status and the national recognition for sporting achievement. The college development plan is detailed and appropriately referenced to strategic issues. These include: continuing to raise standards by effective use of baseline data and targets; building upon the quality of teaching and learning; implementing the National Curriculum strategies and increasing the effectiveness of sixth form provision. The capacity of staff to succeed in these areas of development is good. The college evaluates results carefully and makes use of monitoring information compiled by the local education authority. The college monitors the progress of pupils well from entry in Year 7 up to Year 13. It is becoming more effective in using targets for raising results. In all departments, results are monitored and plans made for improvement. These approaches are being strengthened, with more comparison of results, to help pupils to do their best in all subjects.

83. The overall effectiveness of the governing body is good. The experience and expertise of members of the governing body are well co-ordinated by the Chair of Governors. The governors work closely with senior managers and contribute appropriately to planning improvements. Governors monitor and review the work of the college soundly through their committee structure and the regular information they receive – on results and the budget, for example. They are committed to the continuous improvement of the college, although they currently do not have a development plan for their own training. Governors are vigilant about the health, safety and welfare of pupils. A risk assessment audit was completed recently. Governors are supportive of the college and proud of its status as a Language College, and the exceptional achievements it gains in sporting activities.
84. Financial management and the planning of the use of resources are efficiently related to the college's priorities. The college is effectively maintaining a balanced budget and utilises the additional funding for specialist college status well. An appropriate proportion of the budget is allocated to learning resources for departments. The quality of financial control and provision of budgetary information to senior management are very good. In financial administration there are correct divisions of responsibility and good procedures for ordering, receiving and paying for goods and services purchased by the college. The last financial audit indicated minor areas for improvement of financial efficiency. These have been corrected. Competitive tendering is used for the ordering of goods or services, and the college works hard to achieve the best value in its financial decisions. The administrative staff are very efficient and greatly assist the smooth running of the college.
85. The college appropriately uses special educational needs funding for its designated purpose. Additional funding is used to provide for a special educational needs co-ordinator post, with six teaching assistants, two attached to pupils with statements, and one shared by the inclusion unit. The governors take seriously their responsibility for the entitlement of pupils with special educational needs, with informed links, and they provide a full report annually to parents.
86. The college's systems are not overly bureaucratic; they support the drive for raising standards. The college provides a good quality of education. A positive feature of the college is the shared commitment to improvement. The dedication of senior managers, staff and governors is a significant contributory factor to the effectiveness of the college. The college gives good value for money despite some challenging socio-economic circumstances.
87. Arrangements for performance management are satisfactory. A well-structured programme of focused lesson observations, analysis of planning documents and review meetings is in place. Arrangements for the support and professional development of newly qualified teachers are good. The evaluation of the effects of training, into teaching and learning, is established. All staff, including financial, administrative and site management staff, are involved in training. These staff make a significant contribution to the work of the college.
88. The leadership and management of the special educational needs co-ordinator are very good, but the quality of strategic support provided by the college means that provision overall is satisfactory. The new Code of Practice is in place. Relevant information and data are now being used more rigorously to identify pupils' needs on entry. The special educational needs development plan has adopted a staged approach to reviewing special educational needs provision. Monitoring of pupils through reviews is well planned and improves effective support for pupils; pupils take a full part in this process.

Annual reviews of pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Need take place in accordance with the Code of Practice, with the relevant adults attending with parents and pupils. The college has regular visits from the educational psychologist and also makes appropriate use of local authority services for specialist teaching and advice. Teaching assistants are used strategically, to reflect funding, but this is limited by timetabling constraints and too few teaching assistants. Accommodation for special educational needs is unsatisfactory. The designated room is too small to serve the needs of pupils and the department. The accessibility of the college site for wheelchairs is satisfactory, but the disabled toilets in the physical education block are in an unsatisfactory condition. Resources for pupils who need specialist equipment in lessons are excellent for visually impaired pupils, but the resources in the special educational needs room are insufficient. The computers in the special educational needs room have a fault, and are not on the college network, and laptops for pupils to use in lessons don't have sufficient specification for new programs.

89. The match of teaching to the demands of the curriculum is generally good. The college has experienced a significant turnover of staff and has managed the situation well. The vast majority of staff are well qualified to teach their specialist subjects. Well-planned opportunities for professional development contribute to the effectiveness of all staff. The college values its middle managers and is organising a preparation for leadership course.
90. Resources are good. They are exceptionally strong in information and communication technology, and computers per head in the college are far better than the national norm. Everything the college needs is easily available. Resources are also very good in modern foreign languages, reflecting the college's Language College status. There are strengths in English, mathematics, history, art and design, music and physical education. Resources are inadequate in design and technology.
91. Overall, the standard of accommodation is just satisfactory. It is a difficult site with many separate buildings and uncovered walkways. Some buildings originate from the old boys' grammar school and others have been built since the 1970s when the college became a mixed comprehensive. Although the site has had a good deal of refurbishment very recently there are still areas in need of urgent attention.
92. The main problems with accommodation are in the old Cowley building. Some structural problems have been addressed, but the basement area is in need of refurbishment as there are still some structural and damp problems. The business manager has produced a very good premises development plan, which prioritises future needs. The library building has had some refurbishment, but wall plaster is still crumbling in some rooms.
93. The majority of departments benefit from suited accommodation with a dedicated ICT room. Accommodation is very good in physical education and history and good in modern foreign languages, music, mathematics, geography, English and art and design. The overall number of room spaces is adequate, but some of the rooms are small for the number and size of the pupils, especially in ICT and modern foreign languages; this limits learning opportunities. The modern languages department has a very good language laboratory and linked resource bases. The suite is fully carpeted, but rooms are small. Science accommodation is well looked after and in good condition.
94. Accommodation is unsatisfactory for business studies, design and technology, drama and special educational needs. The business studies rooms are urgently in need of

decoration, new curtains and carpets, and the space is insufficient to enable different learning opportunities. Design and technology is taught in three different buildings. The rooms used in the Cowley building basement are unsatisfactory. There is restricted natural light, peeling paint and the area is in need of complete refurbishment. Space is not ample for food technology and the work surfaces are unhygienic. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is unsatisfactory. The room is too small for the numbers. Disabled toilets in the sports hall area are unsatisfactory and there is no disabled access to three of the science laboratories.

Sixth form

95. The leadership and management are satisfactory. Due attention is paid to monitoring standards and the setting of targets. The provision of guidance and careers advice is effective and efficient. A development plan covers the period 2000-2005. This has a section on the efficiency and effectiveness of sixth form provision, but within this there is not a sufficiently strong focus either on boosting recruitment to those areas of the curriculum that have low numbers or on making necessary improvements to the accommodation. Day-to-day administration is efficient.
96. The head of sixth form has been in post only since September 2002. He meets all form tutors on a regular basis and organises the provision of resources for use in the extended form periods that occur frequently. He has begun to monitor styles of teaching and learning in the sixth form and intends to discuss his findings with heads of department. There are currently almost 200 students in the sixth form. Although this is a large number, which affords a corporate identity, the sixth form does not make a markedly strong impact on the rest of the college. Whilst some sixth formers are involved with paired reading schemes with pupils in the lower college, opportunities for the sixth form to have its most beneficial effect on pupils in the 11 to 16 section of the college have not been clearly identified.
97. The sixth form is self-sufficient overall, but the size of some groups is not cost-effective. For example, there are currently 19 teaching groups with less than six students, most of whom are in Year 13.
98. There is a very good match of teaching expertise to the demands of the curriculum. A large number of the staff has had professional development to cope with teaching a changed curriculum. There is a high level of subject expertise across a wide range of subjects, which, together with very good coaching skills in support of an excellent games and physical education programme, amounts to a very good level of curricular provision.
99. The current accommodation is unsatisfactory. Both its appearance and the facilities that it offers need enhancement. The private study area is housed in the same area as the recreational provision and this makes it very difficult for students to carry out private study effectively.

WHAT SHOULD THE COLLEGE DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

In order to enhance the overall quality of the college's provision, the governors, senior management and staff should:

- (1) improve attainment in mathematics and science in Years 7 to 11 by more effective use of target setting and monitoring of performance;
- (2) improve attendance in Years 10 and 11 by building on the good practice of the 'Monitoring Days';
- (3) increase the variety of teaching methods;
- (4) improve the provision for citizenship by developing a policy for approval, devise a scheme of work that meets National Curriculum requirements and create arrangements for assessing, recording and reporting;

(paragraphs: 2, 4, 8, 21, 33, 40, 59, 107, 113, 125, 126, 127, 142)

Sixth Form

- (1) improve the proportion of higher grades in some A-level courses by monitoring higher achievers and providing sufficient challenge in lessons;
- (2) improve the provision for private study;
- (3) rationalise sixth form provision to improve the cost-effectiveness of some courses;
- (4) improve attendance levels;
- (5) satisfy the statutory requirements for a general, religious education course;

(paragraphs: 12, 23, 47, 55, 97, 88, 193, 204, 214, 241, 246)

Other considerations

- improve the balance of curriculum time for Years 7 to 9, particularly for the humanities; (42,143)
- improve the accommodation provision in design and technology, business studies, drama and special educational needs; (94)
- devise and implement a numeracy policy; (44)
- increase the number of learning support assistants and improve their deployment. (88)

PART C: COLLEGE DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	140
	Sixth form	62
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		54

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
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Years 7 – 11

Number	3	31	50	50	6	0	0
Percentage	2.1	22.1	35.7	35.7	4.2	0	0

Sixth form

Number	3	13	34	10	1	0	1
Percentage	4.8	21	54.8	16.1	1.6	0	1.6

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

Information about the college's pupils

Pupils on the college's roll

	Y7– Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the college's roll	1177	197
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free college meals	332	9

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	39	0
Number of pupils on the college's special educational needs register	239	11

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	5

Pupil mobility in the last college year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the college other than at the usual time of first admission	25
Pupils who left the college other than at the usual time of leaving	35

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
College data	8.7
National comparative data	7.8

Unauthorised absence

	%
College data	1.4
National comparative data	1.2

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 (Year 9)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	128	108	236

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	76	65	65
	Girls	84	60	53
	Total	160	125	118
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	College	68 (54)	53 (60)	50 (64)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	College	33 (27)	29 (32)	19 (28)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	77	65	78
	Girls	87	64	79
	Total	164	129	157
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	College	69 (54)	60 (62)	65 (67)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	College	29 (25)	22 (31)	24 (29)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 (Year 11)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2002	116	123	239

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	50	106	110
	Girls	57	114	121
	Total	107	220	231
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	College	45(40)	92 (89)	97 (95)
	National	50 (48)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	College	35.6
	National	39.8

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% Success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	College	16
	National	*

Attainment at the end of the sixth form (Year 13)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
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	2002	31	27	58

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
College	Number of candidates	31	27	58
	Average point score per candidate	231.9	228.9	230.7
National	Average point score per candidate	*	*	*

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
College	Number of candidates	31	28	57	-	-	-
	Average point score per candidate	231.9	228.9	230.7	-	-	-

National	Average point score per candidate	*	*	*	*	*	*
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**Figures for national comparisons are not available to date.*

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

Categories used in the Annual College Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1366	85	2
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	0	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	1	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	1	0	0
Black or Black British – African	0	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	4	0	0
Chinese	4	0	0
Any other ethnic group	0	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	0	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	95.0
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	14.9

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	23
Total aggregate hours worked per week	779

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74.4
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	23.5
Key Stage 4	18.8

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
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	£
Total income	4,567,248
Total expenditure	4,394,079
Expenditure per pupil	3,198
Balance brought forward from previous year	235,516
Balance carried forward to next year	408,685

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the college during the last two years	36
Number of teachers appointed to the college during the last two years	40

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	1.4
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	1.4

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1405
Number of questionnaires returned	157

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes college.	38	49	10	4	0
My child is making good progress in college.	50	41	6	1	2
Behaviour in the college is good.	43	36	13	4	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	32	41	18	3	5
The teaching is good.	35	60	3	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	39	41	15	3	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the college with questions or a problem.	48	44	6	2	0
The college expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	65	34	1	1	0
The college works closely with parents.	32	53	11	2	2
The college is well led and managed.	41	46	6	3	4
The college is helping my child become mature and responsible.	43	50	4	1	3
The college provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	52	35	4	0	8

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Strong leadership of the department is driving up standards especially at the end of Year 9.
- Good teaching leads to good learning.
- Relationships between pupils and teachers are good and promote learning.

Areas for improvement

- Standards of pupils by the end of Year 11.
- Development of pupils' independent learning in order to improve standards.

100. In the GCSE examinations in 2002, English results were well below the national average. Results in GCSE represent satisfactory achievement overall since they are what would be expected from this cohort of pupils. Attainment in English by pupils at the age of 16 is below average. However, this reflects satisfactory achievement given their starting points. All pupils write with understanding of Shakespearean texts and a range of poetry. Higher attaining pupils write with appreciation and enjoyment. They also read a wide variety of texts and can make inferences. A key feature in these pupils' work is their ability to place texts in a social context and then compare it with modern society. Pupils discuss injustice, inequality and race, but cannot always transfer this to reading and writing. Overall, except for a small minority, presentation of work is careful, reflecting pride in it. Pupils can examine media texts and research references. Lower attaining pupils do not always use standard and non-standard English appropriately. A minority of pupils rely too heavily on the teacher and their work is brief, lacking in detailed understanding and insight. Inaccuracies in spelling, punctuation and grammar mar the work of average and low attaining pupils. The reading and understanding of more complex literature is limited to high attaining pupils. Most pupils in the college enjoy taking part in speaking and listening activities, but lack confidence and speak briefly, except for the high attaining pupils.

101. Results in the 2002 National Curriculum tests for pupils at the age of 14 were in line with the national average and well above average when compared with similar schools. English results were better than those in mathematics and science. This represents good achievement, because, when the pupils joined the college, their overall standards were below average. Higher attaining pupils make good progress because work is matched specifically to their needs. Literacy skills, in particular, have improved. This is partly because of the work done by the college on the National Literacy Strategy. Not only is reading and writing a focus in subjects, but also lessons are planned to incorporate a range of learning activities. The college and the department take this seriously and higher standards in reading and writing are emerging. Basic skills in writing are weak, however, and most pupils' written work contains errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Wide reading is developing because the department recognises the need to broaden and extend pupils' reading ability. Pupils' oral skills are developing in classroom discussion and they are keen speakers in informal situations. A Year 9 lesson on library skills was planned so that the pupils could develop

persuasive speaking and understand questioning techniques. Average and low attaining pupils express themselves more briefly and find it difficult to explain their meaning. The use of new technology is beginning to be used successfully by pupils to present their own persuasive arguments using overhead projectors and video equipment.

102. Writing standards are below average; pupils have grasped key skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar, but express themselves inconsistently and inaccurately in many cases. Their work is generally well presented except for a small minority. High attaining pupils write successfully in a historical context. In a Year 7 lesson on poetry analysis and writing, pupils extended their understanding and use of simile and metaphor. One pupil wrote, 'I am a star that twinkles in the deep, blue sky'. The work of a small minority of pupils is less well presented. Recent initiatives to improve boys' standards include a sensitive choice of texts and rigorous teaching focused on test criteria and high expectations. These are beginning to have a positive impact in improving the reading and writing skills of the pupils. The standards of all pupils are benefiting from a wide choice in the variety of writing and reading assignments. Use of new technology to aid the presentation of work and research skills is developing because of planning and access to technical support.
103. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because of the effective links with the special educational needs department and shared planning of work. Higher attaining pupils make good progress because their needs are planned and catered for.
104. The quality of teaching and learning is good and there are examples of very good teaching and learning, particularly in Years 7 to 9. In a small minority of lessons pupils learn less because the pace is too slow and they are too reliant on their teacher. Effective classroom management strategies are lacking and, consequently, the behaviour of a small minority of pupils is unacceptable. Work is not matched closely enough to their needs, so some can flounder and take up unnecessary amounts of the teacher's time asking questions. In the good and very good lessons there is a brisk pace; pupils are clearly motivated and a large amount of work is completed. Pupils enjoy exchanging ideas with each other and their teacher in an atmosphere of achievement and respect. Pupils respond well to their teachers' care for their achievement and this helps to develop the good relationships evident in the department. In a Year 7 lesson on language, the pupils appreciated working to produce a structured, well-informed discussion. They consciously shaped language for a purpose because they had analysed how effective and rich our language is due to the influence of other European languages. This is because the teacher sensitively drew out their ideas and encouraged their thinking. In a Year 10 lesson preparing for a media assignment, high attaining pupils learned very well because of the variety, pace and high expectations of the teacher. They produced a large amount of work and enjoyed it immensely. The teacher's enthusiasm infected the pupils and careful and sensitive analysis encouraged and developed their love of the subject. As in most lessons, pupils' standards of literacy were developed by a focused, relevant activity. Drama is not a strong feature of the planning and, therefore, pupils miss out on opportunities to develop skills through such activities as role play and improvisation. Most pupils' work is marked regularly and the department makes satisfactory use of assessment information. A small minority of work is not marked up to date and, therefore, pupils show less pride and knowledge in their work. A more detailed analysis of data that targets individual pupils is beginning to help to raise standards.

105. The leadership and management of the department are good. The relatively new head of department has a clear educational vision that inspires both teachers and pupils and is well supported by the second in department. Teachers share the preparation of schemes of work and departmental responsibilities; as a result, they regularly discuss what is best for the pupils. They value and respect their head of department and this has created a committed and effective team. Procedures for assessment are clear, but are not used sufficiently rigorously to set individual pupils' targets. Pupils' work is now cross-checked for progress, standards and capability. The development of new technology resources improves pupils' research and independent learning skills.
106. Progress since the last inspection has been good. Standards have risen for pupils at the age of fourteen. Literacy teaching has been used effectively to target further improvements in English language. More pupils are entered for GCSE examinations. Standards are beginning to rise, and, with the commitment to sharing good practice and attention to identified areas for improvement, the department has the capacity to succeed even further.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Revised schemes of work have produced a broad, balanced curriculum.
- The improved pace of work has improved the rate of pupils' learning.
- The effective use of assessment data enables pupils to have knowledge of their progress and a target for their attainment.
- Strong leadership and clear educational vision have set a sound basis for improved achievement.

Areas for improvement

- Implementation of a numeracy policy in other subjects.
- Use of ICT skills in Years 10 and 11 to widen learning strategies.

107. Standards attained in the National Curriculum tests in 2002 by pupils at the end of Year 9 were well below the national average, but broadly in line with standards in similar schools. The results were similar to those for science, but were not as good as in English. The trend in results over the last few years is below the national picture. The attainment of boys in 2002 was similar to that of the girls. The percentage of pupils obtaining GCSE grades A*-C and A*-G in 2002 was well below the national average. The attainment of boys was better than the attainment of girls
108. The standard of work seen in lessons was significantly better than the results of the National Curriculum tests and GCSE results in 2002 indicated. The unstable staffing situation has been remedied and the National Numeracy Strategy has begun to have a positive impact on attainment. Results from the externally marked optional national tests taken in 2002 show significantly higher achievement in Year 8 with further progress in Year 7. Programmes of Study in all years have been reviewed, directed by effective departmental leadership. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress, but poor memory skills sometimes limit achievement. Pupils understand the use of spreadsheets to record and manipulate data, but there is little evidence of a wider use of ICT. Higher attaining pupils in Year 11 understand the idea of a hypothesis and produce effective displays of their analysis of data from their sample of football results. In Year 11 pupils with special educational needs follow

guidelines to draw frequency diagrams, but do not identify the most appropriate average to use.

109. Pupils enter the college with standards below the national average and inspection evidence indicates that standards are now moving towards the national average, consequently, achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good. The standards of work seen in Year 11 is below national standards; these pupils had results well below the national average in Year 9, consequently, achievement in Years 10 and 11 is also good.
110. Teaching is good overall. One lesson was judged excellent, one unsatisfactory and six out of ten lessons good or better. This is an improvement from the last inspection. Learning objectives are shared with the pupils and in better lessons, achievement in the lesson is evaluated against these objectives. Good lesson structures are in place, forming a sound framework for learning. Effective classroom management is usually allied to challenge at the appropriate level, enabling pupils to learn efficiently. All lessons follow a three-part format with good oral first part, however, a greater use of mental starters is required to re-enforce numeracy skills. Plenary sessions are less effective. They are usually a review, sometimes hurried, of the lesson. An exception was when pupils were asked to describe what they had learned during that lesson. The effective use of individual white boards has not been developed fully and ICT is not used sufficiently, particularly in Years 10 and 11. The marking of pupils' work is satisfactory, but it does not always indicate clearly the necessary steps to show improvement.
111. Leadership and management are very good. There is clear educational vision that has given the department direction and contributed to the improvement in standards. The National Numeracy Strategy is now in place in Years 7, 8 and 9. The college's planned programme of work has been comprehensively revised and provides a sound basis for lesson plans. Liaison with local primary schools has improved, with regular visits by a member of the mathematics department. Monitoring of teaching is more effective. The setting arrangements provide well for pupils with special educational needs and for those with very high attainment. Assessment of progress is very good. There are regular timetabled tests that monitor pupils' understanding. Results are recorded and used to inform pupils of their attainment. Thus, individual achievement is tracked and underachievement identified. Pupils are given target levels in Years 7 to 9 and target GCSE grades in Years 10 and 11. Recent test results are closely analysed and areas of weakness identified. The accommodation in two suites of five classrooms in separate buildings is satisfactory with one room a dedicated room for ICT. Resources have improved, with the provision of up-to-date textbooks affording satisfactory consolidation of mathematical ideas.
112. There has been significant improvement since the last inspection. Achievement has improved; teaching and learning are better and the National Numeracy Strategy is securely in place. Liaison with primary schools has also improved. There is good spirit in the department. The staff work well together with a shared commitment to succeed.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Standards at GCSE were well above those in similar schools in 2002.
- Pupils performed significantly better at GCSE than they did on average in their other subjects.
- An alternative curricular provision is being piloted with the introduction of GCSE applied science.

Areas for improvement

- Standards in the end of Year 9 tests.
- Achievement of girls in National Curriculum tests
- The range of teaching and learning styles used in some lessons.
- The precision in target setting.

113. Standards in the national tests at the end of Year 9 were well below the national average in 2002, and were below those in similar colleges. In recent years results have been increasing in line with the national average, but they dropped significantly in 2002. There was significant underachievement by girls in the 2002 tests.
114. GCSE results in biology, chemistry and physics were above the national averages, although not significantly. Standards in double award science were significantly below the national figure in 2002. Overall, the standards in science results were below average, but well above those in similar schools. Pupils' results in science were significantly higher than those in the average of their other subjects.
115. Standards in the current Years 7 to 9 are below average. Pupils are able to follow instructions and work co-operatively and safely carrying out practical tasks. Pupils make satisfactory progress in their knowledge and understanding of concepts. In Years 10 and 11 the standards seen were also below average, but pupils were always making satisfactory, and often good, progress. Standards of investigations in coursework are good.
116. Since the previous inspection, standards at the end of Year 9 and in science have dropped. Standards in the GCSE separate biology, chemistry and physics examinations have improved and are now in line with the national average. Overall, standards in science at GCSE are well above similar colleges. Regular formal monitoring has been introduced and centralised pupil tracking has recently been introduced. Progress since the last inspection is satisfactory.
117. Teaching is almost always at least satisfactory, and is often good. Teachers generally have a sound knowledge of their subject. Particularly good features were well planned and structured lessons with a variety of activity that were conducted at a good pace with clear timescales being set. Learning objectives were made clear to pupils and were reviewed at the end of the lesson. Starter activities were used effectively to get the lesson underway, and demonstrations, practical work and written activities were used to develop and consolidate pupils' understanding. In some lessons teachers made effective use of 'PowerPoint' presentations. In one very good lesson with a lower set in Year 9 the teacher made very effective use of ICT animations to illustrate and compare light rays with water waves. This was then consolidated with very good demonstrations with a ripple tank and good support materials for the pupils. The principles of diffraction were clearly explained and illustrated with water waves before

being applied to radio and sound waves. Key objectives were reviewed at the end of the lesson. In another lesson with Year 11 the teacher made good use of an excellent video to reinforce key points about velocity and acceleration and to introduce the concept of terminal velocity. Pupils then had to apply their knowledge to explain the different stages in the jump of a skydiver. The lesson was conducted at a brisk pace and concluded with work on thinking and stopping distances. Whilst the great majority of other lessons are at least satisfactory there is scope for improving all lessons to the level of the best. Teacher expectations could be higher in relation to the quantity and pace of working. More emphasis could be given to developing higher order skills such as problem solving. Some valuable teaching time in Years 10 and 11 is spent dealing with quite basic topics that could be more efficiently done for homework. Demonstrations are not always used to illustrate concepts, and improved resources would benefit some lessons. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly, but there is some variation in both the quality of comments and the application of the department's marking system. In one lesson seen the teacher's subject knowledge was inadequate when teaching outside their specialism. More support is required for non-specialists.

118. The department is well organised and managed. Examination results are analysed and this shows that pupils achieve more highly in science than in their other subjects in most, but not all, sets. Measures need to be taken to raise standards of all teaching to that of the best. A good alternative curriculum provision has been introduced in Years 10 and 11 in the form of GCSE applied science. Target-setting procedures are in place, but need to be made more specific and use sub-levels, as is now planned. There is insufficient emphasis on spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues. These need to be treated in a more extended fashion making use of approaches such as debate, small group discussion and role play, for example. There is a commitment in the department to broaden the range of teaching and learning styles.

ART AND DESIGN

Overall, the quality of provision in art and design is **very good**.

Strengths

- The proportion of pupils gaining A*-C grades at GCSE continues to exceed national averages.
- Teaching is good; it promotes learning and interest.
- Homework and coursework are regularly marked with diagnostic comments and National Curriculum Levels. Good use of information and communication technology as a method of enquiry.
- Pupil attitudes are positive and enthusiastic.

Areas for improvement

- Results in art and design last year at the highest grades fell below national averages.

119. By the end of Year 11, pupils make good progress. Many reach standards expected for their age; others exceed this. Drawing, painting and mixed media skills are well developed. Pupils are encouraged to work independently and to pursue individuality of response within a good framework of teacher support and subject knowledge. Artistic and cultural influences make a strong impact on much of the work. The challenging, structured approach to still life drawing in Year 10 and the richness of the batik and multimedia work inspired by African and Egyptian art in Year 11 are good examples.

120. Although attainment on entry is below national expectations, progress by the end of Year 9 is satisfactory. This is the result of course delivery that is well structured and well taught with good resources. Many pupils demonstrate a sound knowledge and understanding of drawing and painting skills. Homework is regularly set, and research supports the development of work. The skilful and varied studies of fish being developed into textile design for a group wall hanging in Year 8 and the carefully sequenced and systematic approach to still life drawing in Year 9 are good examples.
121. The overall quality of teaching is good. Clear aims, a collective start, challenging tasks, good use of demonstration, effective planning and high expectations all contribute to successful outcomes and pupils' progress. In a few classes, pace and output were inappropriate. Work relationships are good and generally very productive. The use of assessment to inform teaching, with regular informative and diagnostic marking, contributes to progress. All pupils are familiar with the assessment system and their own levels of attainment. Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated and make satisfactory progress, but there are insufficient strategies to extend higher attaining pupils.
122. Pupils' behaviour and their attitude to work are good in all years. Many pupils are enthusiastic about their work and take pride in their own achievement. Many acknowledge the progress they have made over time due to the good teaching and organisation in the department.
123. Pupils settle quickly to work and behave well. Many work with determination and concentration. Self-motivation, through increased success and the development of independent learning skills are increasingly evident in Year 11 and the sixth form. Whilst the department recognises the importance of personal development through the spiritual aspects of art and design more could be made of the opportunities that already exist in lesson plans.
124. The department is very well led and managed by an experienced and enthusiastic specialist who sets and maintains high standards. Teaching and learning outcomes are regularly monitored by class visits, made easier by the suited accommodation. There are well-planned, well-resourced schemes of work for all year groups. These include a very wide variety of cultural and international themes, which influence and enrich learning outcomes. Methods of assessment are thorough and applied consistently well across all year groups. Individual target setting is effectively used. Resources are very effectively managed to maintain a very broad and balanced curriculum. Improvement since the last report has been very good. A very stimulating and attractive work environment has been established. A strong team spirit has been engendered and there is a commitment to improve standards further.

CITIZENSHIP

Overall, the quality of provision in citizenship is **unsatisfactory**.

Arrangements for the introduction of citizenship as a National Curriculum subject are as yet embryonic. The college did not meet its statutory requirements in this respect at the time of the inspection.

Areas for improvement

- To develop a policy for citizenship for approval by the governing body and then implement this policy.
- To create arrangements for assessing, recording and reporting citizenship in line with statutory requirements.
- To ensure that the required Programmes of Study are in place for all students in Years 7 to 11.
- To make arrangements for the adequate training of staff in the requirements of the subject, including the contribution to be made from their principal specialisms.

125. A co-ordinator for the subject was appointed only four months ago and she has not yet had the opportunity to develop a strategy either for citizenship or the arrangements by which it is to be delivered. She has not received any training for her role. No work or records were available for inspection and there are no firm arrangements, as yet, for assessment, recording or reporting.
126. So far, an audit has been undertaken of the contribution other subjects can make towards citizenship, and the co-ordinator has analysed the results. It appears that these subject areas do not fully understand the requirements, commitments or responsibilities, as there has been no training for staff. Whilst the response is patchy, some subject areas acknowledge that they will be able to make a significant contribution once clear arrangements are in place.
127. The three principal strands are not embedded, although there are references to citizenship in the programme for personal, social and health education, but not yet for all year groups. Students interviewed in some year groups were aware of some aspects of citizenship, but did not have a full picture of what was meant by the term or what it would involve for them. The co-ordinator is aware of the potential difficulty in ensuring that all pupils take part, especially in the 'participation and responsible action' strand. She is also aware of the reporting requirements for the end of the summer term this academic year, but these are not yet in place.
128. The situation is embryonic. The college is aware that it has made little progress to date towards implementing the requirements, but the new principal, acting in conjunction with the co-ordinator, has already begun to tackle the situation with plans for the college year beginning in September 2003.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in design and technology is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- There is a good team spirit and ethos for learning, which is due to the commitment of teachers and good relationships.
- Teacher-pupil relationships and pupils' behaviour are often good and pupils receive high levels of individual support.
- External and after college opportunities are very good and have a direct impact on learning.
- The impact of ICT is beginning to show in standards of pupils' work.

Areas for improvement

- Co-ordination between the various courses.
- Health and safety risk assessment procedures.
- Assessment to inform curriculum planning and elimination of the inconsistencies in monitoring pupils' progress.
- Accommodation to improve space, resources and state of decoration.

129. Standards in design and technology on entry to the college are low. Pupils have limited appreciation of the principles of design, and practical skills are often underdeveloped. In the 2002 statutory assessments, girls' results were above boys' results as is the case nationally. Approximately one half of the pupils reached the national expectation of Level 5 or above.
130. GCSE results have fluctuated since the last inspection, but significant changes in the curriculum make direct comparisons with the results in 1997 unreliable. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C at GCSE in 2002 was below the national average and very similar to the overall college average. The results have improved since 2001 in graphics, industrial production and food, but slipped significantly in resistant materials. Girls' results overall were significantly higher than boys' at the higher grades A*-C. Results in design and technology graphics were commendable and compared very favourably with the national picture.
131. In the work seen during the inspection, standards were often similar to national expectations by Year 9, with broad variations between the different material areas that collectively deliver the National Curriculum. Pupils do not always recognise and use skills acquired in earlier work to inform increasingly demanding design and make activities in new situations. Pupils use a broad range of resistant and compliant materials, including food. Standards in sketching are variable across the department and this slows design fluency. Research, analysis and evaluation are used effectively as methods for learning; for example, in food technology and nutrition. Here pupils were analysing healthy lifestyles and associated dietary goals, while in graphics they were evaluating pictograms, and in ICT researching car logos.
132. A significant majority of pupils have positive attitudes towards the subject and clearly enjoy the work, in particular the practical aspects; for example, when making a photograph stand in plastic.
133. Teaching is at least satisfactory and occasionally good in Years 7 to 9. Lessons where teaching was satisfactory had some good features, but in some instances pupils did not learn fast enough. For example, in one lesson, the teacher's planning of the

designing aspects lacked imagination and challenge, teaching was over-directed and the focus of the lesson was directed towards the task at the expense of developing learning to the depth and breadth expected.

134. In the work seen during the inspection in Years 10 and 11, standards were extremely variable, but there is a marked improvement as pupils move through this key stage. Pupils' making skills are often at least satisfactory and occasionally good, compared to designing and drawing, which are less well developed. The use and application of ICT, however, is fast beginning to extend and improve the research and presentation of pupils' work. Higher attaining pupils consolidate skill acquisition through good research, organisation and evaluation and produce coursework folders of a good standard. For example, in food and the dietary needs of a vegetarian, suitable for a sportsman or women.
135. Teaching for pupils in Years 10 and 11 is good. The main strengths are teachers' good management of their classes and clear framework for pupils to work. As a result of the effectiveness of teaching and pupils' attitudes and behaviour, pupils' learning is often good. For example, some teachers help pupils to improve their literacy skills through using guidelines or 'frames' to aid their writing. Teachers also plan ways to improve pupils' skills in numeracy and to apply mathematical skills in practical situations. For example, in resistant materials, pupils produce drawings to scale and are encouraged to measure accurately in their working drawings when constructing a box to carry a snooker cue. In the one instance where teaching was less than satisfactory, organisational strategies did not match curricular objectives, management was inappropriate and there was insufficient pace to challenge or inspire; as a result, the pupils learned very little.
136. All pupils receive high levels of individual support, which enable the vast majority of pupils, including those with special educational needs, to make similar progress. Progress for many pupils is helped by taking advantage of supervised access to the specialist rooms at lunchtime and after college. Levels of learning in-class support are extremely limited and in the only instance observed, learning support was very effective. Poor attendance of a significant minority of pupils results in unfinished work and ultimately to unsatisfactory progress.
137. Leadership and management within each of the two departments that collectively deliver the National Curriculum is satisfactory. The co-ordination of strategies and approaches between the two departments is as yet insecure but they are working to extend common strands, for example, all schemes of work have a common format. Changes in management, schemes of work and GCSE courses make comparisons since the last inspection difficult. Curriculum planning and assessment have been revised and tracking of how well pupils are doing has been introduced. These improvements are too recent to evaluate against any higher standards of work and inconsistencies exist due to the overburdening assessment criteria in Years 7 to 9. The department needs to establish common features within each unit of work and, therefore, consider ways of improving continuity within the carousel arrangement in these years. Effective use is made of the very good links the department has established with industry, local colleges and higher education.
138. The only significant improvement in accommodation and resources since the last inspection is the recently established ICT base and receipt of a donated CAM (Computer-Assisted-Manufacturing) milling-machine. Some minor refurbishment and redecoration has taken place, but the 'split-three-site' arrangement does little to foster links. Although there has been some improvement in facilities these are still

inadequate. Technician support in resistant materials and food is very effective in the smooth running of these areas.

139. The design and technology curriculum area has good potential for further improvement due to the ethos and team spirit, which exist across the department.

GEOGRAPHY

Overall, the quality of provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Achievement in Years 7 and 8; pupils work well.
- A comprehensive departmental improvement plan, which is giving coherence to its work.
- Good opportunities for field study and the care given to literacy development.

Areas for improvement

- Standards of attainment.
- Extending the best practice in styles of teaching and learning.
- Eliminate inconsistencies in applying the marking policy

140. In Years 7 to 9 standards are below the national expectation, with only 64 per cent of students assessed at Level 5+ of whom 31 per cent were assessed as operating at the higher Levels 6 and 7 by the end of Year 9 (2001 figures). In 2002 the Level 5+ figure dropped to 56 per cent.

141. Attainment at GCSE has shown a volatile trend over last three years - both in terms of higher grades and points score. Performance is below the national average but A*-G grades are more consistent, meeting the national average. Overall, girls do better than boys. Noticeable, is the small percentage of the cohort opting to take the subject - only 28 per cent for those examined in 2002, although this is higher than for other humanities subjects - and with several option groups in each of Year 10 and 11 that do not reach double figures. The nature and prior attainment of such small groups partly explains the variable performance over the last three years.

142. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in geography is satisfactory. Lessons observed were mostly good or satisfactory although a minority were unsatisfactory. Teaching is variable, producing an inconsistent pattern of learning. That which is good comes mainly from those whose prime task is to teach geography. Here, irrespective of year group, lessons continue at a lively pace, are intellectually challenging and stimulate interest amongst the students. Productivity is good and progress clear to chart. Some lessons, however, are mediocre, over-reliant on worksheets and use too few examples to flesh out the schemes of work to create interest or lead towards independence in learning. They are mechanical, unambitious, insufficiently intellectually challenging and go through the motions rather than show the attributes of the subject to advantage and stimulate students. Skills in delivery need to be sharpened, brought up to date and a wider range of methods and variety of tasks within a lesson should be encouraged.

143. With only one lesson per week in Years 8 and 9, staff are facing a difficult task in trying to deliver the full range of the National Curriculum Programmes of Study, especially to lower attaining groups who are more likely to struggle with what they are expected to do. Therefore, too many lessons become mechanical, mediocre and leave out the interesting and full contribution of the subject to a child's education.

144. In Years 10 and 11, the different option groups receive different time allocations and these have been reduced in the recent past. Two lessons per week are insufficient to cover the demanding GCSE specifications, which include a significant commitment to coursework, its preparation and follow up.
145. From a scrutiny of pupils' work, it is evident that their knowledge, understanding and skills are now developing, indicating achievement moving forward, assessment objectives being reached and progress being made over time. However, in Years 7 to 9 the quality of work was variable, sometimes with limited coverage of topics as a result of the lack of time given to the subject in Years 8 and 9. The department marking policy is inconsistently applied with too little constructive feedback or evidence of the translation of target setting after assessment into suggestions for improvement in their books. The coursework is well managed. High standards are sought to maximise scores whatever the ability of the pupil.
146. Relationships between staff and pupils are very good. Relationships seen between pupils in lessons were equally positive, in group work, pairs or whole-class lesson work, when mutual assistance could be seen. Behaviour was a positive feature in most lessons with high standards expected and delivered.
147. The department has made unsatisfactory progress since the previous inspection. The head of department has been in post only four terms and inherits the legacy of underperformance and declining numbers. This will not be reversed immediately, but she has already analysed the situation and introduced significant steps such as a revised assessment policy, emphasis on literacy and the contribution of geography to citizenship and social, cultural and moral issues, scrutiny of targets and progress made. These steps are having a positive effect, especially in Years 7 and 8. The department is now being well led, but the issues of curriculum time and some inconsistency in teaching practice need to be resolved.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Teaching of pupils in Years 7 to 9 is good.
- Attitudes, behaviour and personal development of pupils are good and promote learning.
- Effective marking of pupils' work supports pupils' learning.
- The use of ICT stimulates interest.

Areas for improvement

- Attainment of pupils at the end of Year 11.
- Allocation of teaching time in Years 7 to 11.
- Opportunities to develop numeracy skills.

148. In the GCSE results of 2002, the proportion of A*-C grades awarded was below the national average for maintained secondary schools. These results, however, represent a notable improvement upon those of 2001 when the proportion of pupils gaining A*-C grades was well below average. In a reversal of the national trend, boys markedly outperformed girls. Strategies that are being used this year to sustain improvement include extra tuition sessions on a voluntary basis after college and at lunchtimes

149. In work seen, pupils' attainment by the end of Year 9 is average, confirming the teacher assessments of 2002. In the middle and lower bands, the performance of girls is better than that of boys. The achievement of pupils from Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. Progress is notable in four of the five key elements of the National Curriculum. The development of chronological awareness is satisfactory. An analysis of pupils' notebooks indicates their range and depth of knowledge have increased and they develop the necessary skills of enquiry. Pupils' understanding that historical events, issues and personalities are always capable of differing interpretation is less well developed. By the end of Year 9, most pupils attain at least a satisfactory standard of literacy; the writing skills of lower attainers are much weaker and they are inclined to leave some pieces of writing unfinished, but they represent the subject well in illustrative form.
150. The attainment of pupils at the age of 16 is below the national average. The achievement of these pupils is satisfactory given their prior attainment. Clear progress from Year 9 is seen in a greater depth of study and in the competent use of both primary and secondary sources to produce GCSE coursework. Some work is completed to an impressive standard as regards both content and literary presentation. Pupils also markedly improve their knowledge and understanding of some of the major political developments of the 20th century. Evaluation of sources, however, is not sufficiently developed, especially as regards insight as to why their writers often take contrasting views of issues.
151. The attitudes, behaviour and personal development of pupils in both key stages are good. They show a conspicuous interest in the subject and maintain a good level of concentration throughout lessons in every period of the college day. The interest shown and the level of effort made in two lessons for lower attaining groups in Year 7 and 8, both of which included a significant number of pupils with special educational needs (SEN), was of particular note. Take-up rates at the start of Year 10 compare very favourably with those for other optional subjects in the humanities area. Positive working relationships are evident between teachers and pupils and amongst pupils themselves. Books, resources and equipment are treated with a proper respect and pupils are generally courteous and well mannered. Pupils with special educational needs make a good level of progress in their lessons even though the occasions on which they have extra support from classroom assistants are rather few.
152. The quality of teaching is good overall. It is good for pupils aged 11 to 14, with some very good elements, and satisfactory for pupils aged 14 to 16, but with some features that are good. All teachers have a secure command of subject. High expectations are a pleasing feature of their lessons for pupils of lower attainment in addition to those for the higher attainers. In a Year 8 class, for example, that was composed predominantly of SEN pupils, the main task set required thinking about knowledge gained and applying it in a way that consolidated learning. Lesson planning is meticulous, although on occasion there is an inadequate amount of time in the plenary for a full appraisal of progress. Homework is set regularly in every year to extend classroom learning or to prepare for the next topic; the marking of it is very thorough, indicating areas for improvement as well as giving praise and encouragement as appropriate. More opportunities that allow for the enhancement of pupils' numeracy need be taken and a stronger emphasis on teaching interpretations of history would lead to an improvement in learning.
153. The curriculum is thoroughly planned and satisfies all statutory requirements. The allocation of time for the subject, however, is inadequate in both key stages. This means that it is more difficult to cover the National Curriculum in sufficient breadth and

to teach adequately those skills that are essential for success at GCSE, especially in classes that include a wide range of ability. The taught curriculum is enhanced by visits for Years 7 to 9 to museums and sites of historical interest.

154. Leadership and management are good overall. There is a good ethos for learning and a shared commitment to improvement. All teachers are subject specialists. The accommodation is suited; it includes computer facilities and is enhanced in appearance by good displays of pupils' work and related materials. Resources overall are good in quality and range, although the provision of more topic books at foundation level for use in Years 7 to 9 would be beneficial. Departmental meetings are held regularly and minutes are produced. Although there is a development plan, this needs to focus more prominently on the raising of GCSE standards of attainment. The quality of teaching has been evaluated via a scrutiny of pupils' work, but there have, as yet, been no classroom observations undertaken by the acting head of department.
155. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. There is no unsatisfactory teaching now and there are no weaknesses in teachers' knowledge and understanding at any stage. The quantity of learning resources has been increased and now comprises items in the ICT category. There is also a markedly greater use of ICT in both teaching and learning in every year.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Results in 2002 for GNVQ ICT were above average.
- The quality of assessment is good in Years 10 and 11; it helps students to set targets for their work.
- Consistently good teaching in Years 10 and 11.
- Teachers have good relationships with pupils, who are very interested in the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Teaching pupils the full range of ICT skills in Years 7, 8 and 9 so that they can make better use of ICT in other subjects.
- More accurate assessment of pupils' ICT capabilities in relation to National Curriculum Levels.
- Ensure that all pupils in Years 10 and 11 receive their full ICT entitlement.

156. Results of GCSEs in 2002 were above national levels showing that there was good achievement by these pupils.
157. The standards of work seen during the inspection by pupils at the age of 14 are at expected levels. Pupils taking ICT examination courses in Year 11 are working at the levels expected for their age and in line with national averages. In Year 7 pupils can log on to the network and have basic word-processing skills, and understand how to layout business and personal letters. They understand how to change fonts, import and resize 'Clipart' and other images to enhance the presentation of their work. In mathematics pupils make good use of spreadsheets to display soccer statistics, with tables and graphs. Pupils in Year 8 make use of ICT in other subjects. In mathematics pupils learn how to use formulae in spreadsheets to calculate area. In mathematics in Year 9 pupils use computers to graph equations, and in English in this year they learn

how to use 'PowerPoint' to illustrate a soldier's life in the First World War and characters in 'Macbeth'.

158. Pupils taking ICT courses in Years 10 and 11 make use of a variety of skills. In spreadsheet work, pupils understand how to use complex formulae to work out breakeven costs, which they display with line graphs. Pupils know how to set up databases and understand fields, primary keys and how to search and query databases. In presenting information units of work, pupils make use of more advanced word-processing skills and have confidence in importing images to enhance presentations. They show good understanding of key aspects of creating effective flyers to promote businesses.
159. Teaching is good overall; it is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers make very effective use of their very good subject knowledge to give clear explanations, which helps pupils to learn. There are good relationships between teachers and pupils, and the positive attitudes displayed by pupils contribute to their learning. Lessons are well planned, particularly in examination classes where the examination syllabuses are divided into smaller units called wallets. The information and the requirements to complete wallets is extremely well prepared, and available to pupils on the college Intranet as well as in booklets produced by the department, which enables pupils to work independently and at their own levels. One of the strengths of this method is through the assessment scheme, which is very detailed and allows teachers, and the pupils themselves, to set both short-term targets for lessons and longer ones for sections of work. Marked work gives pupils clear indications of how they can improve and, therefore, gain higher marks. Teachers make very effective use of technology with the Intranet, the use of data projectors and interactive white boards, which are effective in helping pupils to understand processes, when they can see them clearly displayed.
160. In all lessons, pupils make some progress as they learn new skills and reinforce existing ones. In Year 7 pupils build on skills learned in primary schools as they increase in confidence in using computers. They make good progress in word-processing and presentation skills using a publisher program. However, they have insufficient time in Year 7 to learn the full range of skills that might be expected for pupils of this age. Although they make use of computers in other subjects and, consequently, learn new skills, they do not have enough time to develop these skills in sufficient depth in Years 8 and 9. There is good progress by pupils taking ICT courses in Years 10 and 11, to achieve national levels, with limited ICT experience earlier in the college. Although some pupils continue to develop ICT skills in Years 10 and 11, mainly through a range of GNVQ courses, not all pupils take these courses, and, therefore, may not have their full entitlement of ICT in these years.
161. Good progress has been made since the last inspection, although only pupils in Year 7 have a short, discrete ICT course. However, there has been a considerable increase in the number and quality of computers available throughout the college. GNVQ courses have been introduced in Years 10 and 11, and pupils have achieved results above national levels.
162. The department is very well led and managed. There is a clear vision for the ongoing development of the subject, with a committed team of teaching and support staff. Considerable work has been done to establish the college Intranet as a key tool not only for the teaching of ICT, but also to support all other subjects.

163. Cross-curricular ICT is good, as departments have been well equipped with computers and data projectors, to enable them to make use of computer technology in their teaching. Teachers have completed ICT training, and receive considerable support from the ICT department. Departments have the responsibility for teaching specific ICT skills, and are supported with suitable materials and assessment criteria to help to judge pupils' performances. Good progress is made by pupils learning to use spreadsheets in mathematics and 'PowerPoint' presentations in English. In modern foreign languages, good use is made of technology in the new language suite, where extensive use is made of interactive whiteboards and video conferencing by pupils with French pupils.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Overall, the quality of provision in modern foreign languages is **good**.

Strengths

- Improved standards and good attainment in French and German as a result of high quality teaching and learning.
- Increased application and availability of ICT resources to stimulate learning and improve lesson presentation.
- Substantial improvement in the breadth of curriculum provision in all year groups.
- Very strong leadership and management of the department.

Areas for improvement

- Improve pupils' active use of the foreign language and the quality of their pronunciation.
- Focus on increasing the take-up rate by Year 11 pupils of further study in the sixth form.

164. The attainment of pupils aged 11 to14 is in line with average expectations overall and there is an improved grasp of grammatical structures in most lessons. Pupils' levels of comprehension of written and spoken text are generally higher than their oral skills and there is little evidence of pupils' use of the foreign language to communicate or seek help. Pupils do, however, have some difficulty in understanding the teachers' instructions in the foreign language. Written work is usually accurate, although limited in scope. Pupils make at least satisfactory and often good progress in all the languages offered, particularly in reading and listening skills. Standards in lessons reflect the teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9.
165. The attainment of pupils aged 14 to16 is at least average and often good. For example, in a higher attaining, Year 11 German set, pupils showed a solid understanding of tense construction and word order, applied these correctly in both spoken and written work and were able to produce complex language. Similarly, in a Year 10 French class pupils dealt particularly well with a challenging reading task, applying a range of techniques to identify meaning. Standards in listening and reading are often above average, but in some lessons pupils' confidence to use the foreign language is only satisfactory and pronunciation is too anglicised. Recent GCSE results in French at grades A*-C remain below the national average and have shown little improvement since the last inspection, whereas results in German have shown a steady improvement albeit with a small number of candidates in the most recent examination. Pupils in this age range make good and frequently very good progress in the mastery of grammar and vocabulary.

166. Pupils make good progress overall and this is reinforced by the maintenance of high standards in attitudes and behaviour due to the positive learning atmosphere established in classrooms. The improvements in accommodation and the good quality of display also enhance the learning environment.
167. Teaching in the main school is good. There is no unsatisfactory teaching and in nearly one third of lessons observed it is very good indeed. It is particularly good with the 14 to 16 age group in both French and German where a brisk pace, planned variety of activities and setting of challenging tasks result in pupils' full commitment to their work and high standards being reached. This is an improving picture since the last inspection particularly with the additional application of information and communication technology through the use of interactive whiteboards and state-of-the-art language laboratory facilities. Relationships between teachers and pupils are invariably very positive and time is well used in most lessons. Pupils' work is regularly marked with helpful commentary on how they might do better and there is greater and improved consistency in the procedures and quality of assessment.
168. The work of the department has been improved considerably, although there is, as yet, insufficient direct evaluation of teaching quality. Overall management is very good, there is a structured and costed development plan and the head of department provides a high level of support to her staff, with a focus upon enhancing their professional development.
169. Curriculum provision for all age groups is exceptional. The breadth of opportunity and language diversification ensure that unusually large numbers of pupils have access to a range of language study, both in the mainstream and through additional language learning opportunities. A priority, however, must be to encourage more Year 11 pupils to take up further study to AS or A-level in the sixth form.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- The extra-curricular provision is very good; it includes trips abroad.
- The effective use of resources outside of the college.
- The productive working atmosphere in the department.

Areas for improvement

- Use of ICT in music in Years 7 to 9.
- Better use of assessment, including the comparability of attainment target levels.

170. Attainment by the end of Year 9 is below the national average; the teachers' assessment of the proportion of pupils achieving Level 5 or above in 2002 was above the national average, but issues of staff continuity at that time make the assessment unreliable. GCSE results are well below the national average for grades A*-C, and below the national average for grades A*-G, and these results reflect the ability of pupils. The very wide nature of the option group that includes music tends to lead to low ability GCSE option sets with few having playing skills. This has an obvious impact on examination results. Pupils' low literacy skills present problems in pupils being able to understand some elements of the final examination. It also explains the gap between teaching quality and pupil attainment at this level; as a consequence of the good teaching, achievement is good.

171. Attainment in work seen in Years 7 to 9 is below the national average; it is well below the national average in Years 10 and 11. Setting in Years 7 to 9 leads to low self-esteem from lower ability groups, and is not appropriate to the needs of the subject. Many pupils have very weak musical experience and skills on entry. However, two pieces created in a higher attaining Year 9 class demonstrated understanding of minimalist principles and interlocking melodic rhythm. Pupils with special educational needs attain appropriately, and those showing musical ability are extended through extra-curricular music and instrumental teaching. Numbers receiving instrumental tuition are increasing, and the college funds lessons for beginners. Extra-curricular work, including annual shows and foreign music tours, provide an exciting extension to the curriculum for a significant number of pupils. Work with groups such as the BBC Philharmonic and a professional samba band give those pupils involved a valuable musical experience.
172. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 11. The best teaching is characterised by good relationships, where pupils are well known, and which create a good atmosphere for learning. Planning and preparation are also good, with clear targets established in lessons; published material is very well used. Organisation and management of pupils are very good, with a calm and unflustered manner keeping potentially difficult pupils on task. Staff have significant expertise, which is readily available to pupils, especially in the various forms of contemporary music. Questioning is generally good, but was sometimes over-focused on factual knowledge. Learning was seen through listening and analysis, by doing and refining skills and work in progress, and by learning and applying new skills. The content and the balance between learning 'through' music and learning 'about' music is not always fully appropriate for all pupils, and this limits opportunities for learning.
173. Pupils' response is good in all years. Pupils are often enthusiastic and bubbly. GCSE pupils sometimes show a casual attitude to work. Overall, pupils are mutually supportive and respond well to teacher input.
174. The curriculum is broad and balanced, including appropriate world and historical content. The recent input of ICT resources is having a positive impact on learning. The head of department has only been in post for two terms, and major developments are already in place. The quality of leadership is good and management is efficient.
175. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory; all issues have been addressed, and recent resource improvements in ICT are underpinning exciting developments.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in physical education is **excellent**.

Strengths

- Leadership and management of the department are excellent.
- Teaching is very good overall ensuring that pupils learn very effectively.
- Standards of attainment in GCSE are excellent.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good, often excellent.
- Provision for extra-curricular activities and the achievements of some individuals and teams are excellent.

Areas for improvement

- Objectives should be made clearer in lesson planning.
- Pupils should be given more opportunity to evaluate their own performance and that of others.
- In some games activities there is insufficient opportunity to apply skills in appropriate games.
- Improve standards in GCSE dance.

176. Standards achieved by pupils in GCSE physical education examinations over the past three years have been excellent. The percentage of pupils who achieve A*-C grades is very high compared to national averages. Pupils achieve significantly better in physical education than they do in the other subjects that they take. Results in GCSE dance in 2002 were significantly below the national average as a result of staffing issues in the first year of the course.
177. In lessons, the standards seen in Years 10 and 11 are good overall, but vary from very good to unsatisfactory in different groups. Boys in Year 10 GCSE show very good individual skills in soccer and apply them very well in small-sided activities. Rugby is a significant strength of the college and standards in Year 10 are good overall. In GCSE theory lessons for lower attaining pupils, the majority are working below the standards required to achieve a C grade. Most girls in Year 11 dance lessons perform at a good standard in their set dance routine with a small group achieving very high standards. Theory grades for the group in tests so far show that almost one half of the group are achieving at grade C or above. As a result, the department is very confident that the results in 2003 will improve significantly.
178. Pupils who enter the college in Year 7 show good, or sometimes very good, individual skills in some activities. However, the general standard over the range of activities is broadly in line with that expected nationally for their age. Assessments made by teachers show that standards achieved by pupils by the end of Year 9 are well above the national average, representing very good progress. Some pupils display excellent standards for their age. In lessons seen in Years 7 to 9 the standards achieved by pupils are generally at least good. For example, the majority of girls in Year 8 perform jumping and landing activities on the floor and apparatus at a very good standard. Shapes are varied and landings are well controlled. Pupils use apparatus, including trampettes, very safely. Ball handling skills in Year 8 rugby are excellent, although rucking techniques are still developing. Overall standards in Year 9 dance are very good. Pupils perform with very good skills and compose their own phrases for a jazz dance. However, standards in some lessons, especially in the lower attaining hockey and volleyball groups, are unsatisfactory or poor. Many pupils show little accuracy when passing or control when dribbling. Volleyball has only recently been introduced to the girls and the standards do not reflect those in other activities and in higher groups.
179. Throughout the college pupils with special educational needs make very good progress and many represent college teams.
180. Teaching throughout the college is always satisfactory and is very good or better in the majority of lessons enabling pupils to learn very effectively and make very good, often excellent, progress. Teachers have substantial strengths and are extremely committed to providing very good quality curricular and extra-curricular activities. In all lessons relationships with pupils are very good and teachers and pupils show mutual respect. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge, are very well organised and give clear explanations and instructions so that pupils know what to do and how to improve. They enable pupils to acquire new skills and challenge them to improve through planned,

progressive activities and appropriate intervention in most lessons. Teachers have excellent pupil management strategies and ensure that pupils stay on task, work with good physical effort and behave well. Pupils are given good opportunity to work individually and in groups. Teaching styles are varied and appropriate to the different learning styles and needs of groups. In particular, the use of white boards and matching games in theory sessions with lower attaining groups are very effective. Objectives are not always clear in short-term planning and pupils are not given sufficient opportunity to evaluate their own work and that of others. Teachers provide very good opportunities for pupils to learn and use specific vocabulary. Some good opportunities for numeracy are provided in health-related activities when pupils measure and compare performance.

181. Teaching is excellent in Year 11 dance. Both teachers involved have excellent knowledge and give demonstrations of the highest quality to enable pupils to make excellent progress. Very good teaching ensures that pupils learn very effectively in Year 10 soccer, and in GCSE theory lessons with lower attaining pupils. Although standards in Year 9 badminton are satisfactory, the teaching is very good and pupils learn new skills. In Year 8 rugby and gymnastics teaching is very good and pupils acquire new skills, make very good progress and achieve very good standards. Pupils learn very effectively in Year 9 dance because the teacher has very good knowledge, provides very good opportunities for the girls to compose their own phrases and has great enthusiasm, which rubs off on the pupils.
182. Physical education and sport have a very high status for pupils and, as a result, their attitudes to the subject are excellent. In all lessons behaviour is very good and pupils show excellent physical effort, are very keen and stay on task. Pupils are very enthusiastic and enjoy their activities. When teachers are giving instructions or teaching points they listen well and respond very well to questions. Relationships are very good and pupils work well together in pairs and small groups. They show good sporting attitudes and abide by rules and conventions of activities.
183. Leadership and management of the department are excellent. Schemes of work are fully revised and of very good quality. Although games is very much the strength of the college the curriculum is broad and balanced and satisfies National Curriculum requirements. The quality and range of learning opportunities are excellent. The departmental development plan has clear action points for future development, and policies and procedures are comprehensive. Monitoring of teaching and learning and procedures for performance management are excellent. There are seven full-time specialists and the department benefits from the support of many other teachers. Many of these are qualified in particular sports, and work very effectively in the whole-year games lessons and in the very extensive extra-curricular programme.
184. Talented pupils get excellent opportunities to achieve at the highest levels. The commitment to the provision of extra-curricular activities is exceptional with staff giving their time willingly after lessons and at the weekend. The college has for many years enjoyed success in rugby and this has been continued so that teams achieve at the very highest level in local, regional and national levels when competing against state and independent schools. Individual pupils from the college have played rugby league and rugby union at regional and national levels. Other sports are also very strong with netball, athletics, hockey and cricket played throughout the college, with outstanding success in local and regional competitions. Recent sporting tours have included a cricket tour to Vancouver and a rugby tour to New Zealand. Pupils gain very good cultural awareness through the trips. The college has received a Sportsmark award and is currently finalising its bid for Sportsmark Gold.

185. Assessment procedures and the monitoring of pupil performance are very good. Pupils know how well they are achieving and are involved in the setting of targets. Pupils in GCSE have good opportunities to use CD-ROMs and the Internet to enhance their knowledge of anatomy and physiology and the analysis of sporting performance. The department benefits from a very good suite and practical accommodation.
186. The department has continued to make improvements from a strong position in the previous inspection. For example, extra-curricular activities have improved as success is now measured against mainly independent schools, schemes of work are fully reviewed and in place and standards in GCSE are exceptional.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Data is used well to monitor pupil progress.
- Management of pupils is very good and is reflected in positive attitudes of pupils.
- Specialist teachers contribute to the quality of provision.

Areas for improvement

- The amount of time in Years 10 and 11 to meet fully the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus.
- Planning to provide activities for pupils to debate their views with each other and tasks to apply what they are learning about religions.

187. Pupils enter the college with below average attainment required by the agreed syllabus. They are unable to recall the main features of any religion and some are unsure of what living religions are. By the end of Year 9, pupils' awareness of religions and their role in social and moral issues are average for the higher attaining groups. Pupils with special educational needs achieve better than expected. In 2002, the results at GCSE were average compared with pupils' performance nationally. The proportion of boys taking GCSE is now increasing. They are interested in the subject and value moral and religious understanding as important for living and working in a changing and multicultural society. By Year 11, standards in lessons and in the work seen are average for boys and girls taking GCSE. In Years 7 to 9 all pupils make good progress, increasing their knowledge of religions and their teachings. In Years 10 and 11, pupils studying for GCSE continue to make good progress, although a change in the system has resulted in more pupils with below average attainment choosing the subject. All other pupils have one lesson a week, which also provides for personal and social education. Pupils continue to develop their insights into adult spiritual, ethical and moral choices, but do not have time to increase their understanding of the varied role and influence of world religions. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory, with GCSE established and numbers increasing. There is still insufficient time for pupils to cover the requirements of the agreed syllabus.

188. By the end of Year 9 pupils have a good grasp of moral issues when making laws, deciding punishment and in personal choices about abortion. When comparing and contrasting views, and identifying how beliefs affect actions, pupils understand that there are different groups within Christianity, but do not apply this to other religions. They state clearly their own and others' position on issues, and explain why, but do not argue the relative merit of different attitudes and teachings. They are not able to give reasons why believers who apply similar beliefs and values of Christianity or other religions, can behave in different ways.
189. By the end of Year 11, GCSE pupils are able to select and organise relevant information about what influences Christians and Muslims when considering commitment, marriage and divorce. Their overview of each religion is not sufficiently secure to demonstrate the purpose of particular religious practices, the key aspects of a religion's codes of behaviour and why religious beliefs and principles are significant for human experiences, which all share. Pupils who study a non-examination course reflect impressively on their own values and attitudes and how they would express these through their behaviour and responses to important events in their lives, such as choice of lifestyle or bereavement.
190. In Years 7 to 9, teaching and learning are always satisfactory and often good. Lessons are well planned, using good support material and appropriate resources from religions, newspapers and video. Planning does not provide enough activities for pupils to debate their views with each other and tasks to apply, to show what they are learning about religions. Teachers' specialist subject knowledge contributes to the quality of provision. Relationships and the management of pupils are always good and are reflected in the positive attitudes of pupils. Marking and monitoring are done regularly, but expected levels of attainment are not shared sufficiently with pupils to provide them with a framework for their progress and to help pupils' self-knowledge of their learning. In Years 10 and 11 teaching and learning are satisfactory, matching work to the attainment of the pupils. All pupils contribute in lessons and opportunities are well used for good spiritual, moral and social development. A range of teaching methods is used very effectively, including working in groups. Good use of questions encourages pupils to formulate answers, but this needs extending to written work. GCSE targets and skills are not used to organise and grade tasks or feedback on achievement. In Years 7 to 11 pupils use ICT for presentation of work, but insufficient advantage is taken of the increasing number of resources about religions on the Internet.
191. Leadership and management are good. The head of department is clear about the role, and has supported college initiatives on literacy and gifted and talented pupils. Monitoring and use of data are very good, providing evidence of pupils' performance, and informing departmental practice. Resources need updating and matching to pupil need and new course requirements. Outings to religious places of worship are organised for each year group, but similar experiences need extending to all pupils. In Years 7 to 9 the subject has less time than other humanities subjects. The time for the GCSE course limits the opportunities to meet the examination requirements. Non-examination classes are not meeting statutory requirements, as was the case at the last inspection.

PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002

GCE AS-level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		College	England	College	England	College	England
English	8	100.0		12.5		5.00	
English Lit.	7	71.4		14.3		2.57	
Mathematics	7	71.4		42.9		5.43	
Biology	25	72.0		28.0		4.00	
Chemistry	8	75.0		50.0		5.25	
Physics	7	57.1		28.6		3.43	
Psychology	23	69.6		17.4		2.78	
Design Technology	8	62.5		0.0		2.75	
Business Studies	15	93.3		40.0		5.33	
Geography	3	100.0		33.3		6.00	
History	7	85.7		42.9		5.43	
Religious Studies	4	100.0		25.0		6.00	
Classical Civilisation	5	100.0		40.0		5.20	
French	5	100.0		0.0		4.40	
German	10	20.0		0.0		0.60	
Art	11	100.0		27.3		5.27	
Theatre Studies	3	66.7		33.3		4.67	
PE	13	92.3		23.1		5.08	
Music	3	100.0		0.0		2.00	
Dance	2	50.0		0.0		3.00	
General Studies	2	50.0		0.0		1.00	

National comparative data is unavailable at this stage

GCE A-level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		College	England	College	England	College	England
English (A-level)	14	92.9		28.6		4.86	
English lit. (A-level)	3	100.0		33.3		4.00	
Mathematics (A-level)	7	100.0		85.7		8.29	
Biology (A-level)	12	83.3		25.0		4.83	
Chemistry (A-level)	7	100.0		42.9		6.86	
Physics (A-level)	4	100.0		75.0		7.50	
Psychology (A-level)	9	66.7		22.2		3.78	
Design Technology (A-level)	10	90.0		40.0		5.40	
Business Studies (A-level)	15	80.0		13.3		3.60	
Geography (A-level)	13	84.4		23.1		3.54	
History (A-level)	3	100.0		66.7		7.33	
Religious Education (A-level)	3	100.0		33.3		6.00	
French (A-level)	1	100.0		0.0		6.00	
Art (A-level)	4	100.0		25.0		6.00	
Theatre Studies (A-level)	2	100.0		50.0		7.00	
PE (A-level)	8	87.5		25.0		4.75	
Leisure and Tourism (AVCE - Dual Award)	1	100.0		0.0		5.00	
Health and Social Care (AVCE-Dual Award)	4	100.0		75.0		7.50	
Travel and Tourism (AVCE - Dual Award)	2	100.0		50.0		7.00	
ICT (AVCE - Single Award)	20	95.0		65.0		7.50	

National comparative data is unavailable at this stage.

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	Number in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		College	England	College	England	College	England
Leisure and Tourism	9	66.7	-	11.1	-	0.0	-
Science	4	25.0	-	25.0	-	0.0	-
Health and Social Care	8	62.5	-	0.0	-	0.0	-

National comparative data is unavailable at this stage.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

A-LEVEL SCIENCE

192. The focus was on biology, but chemistry, physics and AVCE science were also sampled. In chemistry results were below average in 2001, but were in line with students' standards in other subjects. Standards rose significantly in 2002 and were higher than predicted from students' prior attainment. One revision lesson was observed, which was satisfactory. In physics the results were below average in 2001, but rose dramatically in 2002 and were well above predictions based on prior attainment. Two lessons were observed. A revision lesson in Year 13 where students were preparing for a module test, working from past questions was satisfactory. A Year 12 lesson was good. In the first lesson of a series, students were doing practical work on measuring resistance prior to undertaking planning for more complex investigations in later lessons. One lesson of AVCE science was observed. This was satisfactory. Students were preparing for a series of practical tests on plastics that they would be carrying out in a later lesson. Data on students' performance to date showed that they were achieving higher standards than would be predicted on the basis of prior attainment.

BIOLOGY

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

Strengths

- In recent years standards have been significantly higher than in students' other subjects.
- Teaching is good overall.

Areas for improvement

- Research and independent work undertaken by students.
- The range of teaching and learning styles.
- Use of data-logging needs to be increased.
- Use of ICT to promote effective learning.
- A development plan for biology.

193. Standards at GCE A-level were below the national average in 2001. The proportion obtaining higher A/B grades was below the national level. The proportion obtaining a pass grade was in line with the national average. Standards rose in 2002. In recent years students' results in biology have generally been significantly higher than in most of their other subjects.

194. The standards of work of current students in Year 13 are above average. For example, this is shown in their knowledge and understanding of the structure and function of muscle and the nerve muscle junction, the action of neurotransmitters and the conduction of the nerve impulse. Standards in Year 12 are also above average; for example, students have a good understanding of the structure and function of DNA.

195. Teaching is good overall and as a consequence students make good progress. During the inspection one half of the lessons seen were revision lessons. Good features seen in lessons were starter activities to engage students from the beginning of the lesson, clear explanation, use of questioning to check students' understanding, clear and

demanding timescales for activities and variety of activity. Teaching approaches used include teacher-led explanation, practical work and use of past questions. Fieldwork is undertaken, which gives students an opportunity for some extended study; for example, of succession on sand dunes and fresh water ecology. The range of teaching approaches is at present somewhat narrow. There is too little independent work, research, small group discussion and use of student presentations. Some use of ICT is made for simulations, of the sodium pump for example, but at present this is insufficient. There is not enough use of data-logging. While teaching is generally good, one lesson was observed where the pace of working was too slow as a result of no clear timescales being set. Homework is set regularly and is marked.

196. Students enjoy their subject, respond well in lessons and make good progress as a result. They work individually and co-operatively in groups.
197. Work in biology is well led and this is reflected in the good progress students make. There is a need for a development plan for biology, with clear targets identified to raise standards further.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- The good teaching provides a challenging education leading to high standards at A-level.
- Assessment data is used well to track the progress of students.
- The secure management of mathematics provides an effective framework for learning.
- The mutual respect of teachers and students contributes to a joint commitment to succeed.

Areas for improvement

- Widen the range of learning strategies, including greater involvement of ICT.

198. Results in 2001, the last year with validated data for comparison, show both A and AS-levels results to be in line with the national average. Results for 2002 show a significant improvement on the 2001 results; this continues the trend of good results in recent years. In addition, the small number of candidates who undertake further mathematics reach a high standard.
199. The standard of work seen at AS and A-levels matches the standard achieved in 2001, that is, in line with the national picture. For example, Year 12 students, in their first lesson on mechanics were able to analyse accurately graphs showing the change in displacement and velocity with time in linear and non-linear examples. Also in an introductory lesson, Year 13 students confidently applied the principal of moments to calculate forces in increasingly complex situations. A scrutiny of students' files shows a wide range of solutions to mathematical problems with a high rate of accuracy. Students who are to sit their GCSE examination are able to expand brackets, but find factorisation more difficult. Year 12 students taking a course in key skills demonstrate satisfactory mental skills and produce effective displays of data showing the use of sunscreen at different locations.
200. Students enter AS and A-level courses with average attainment and achieve results that are above average, consequently, progress is good.

201. Teaching is good overall, with some being very good. The teachers demonstrate a thorough knowledge of their subject and communicate it well to their students in a clear, concise manner. Work is challenging and students at all levels respond well showing interest and a willingness to share ideas and question what is taught. The move to encourage more independent learning is established. For example, students in Year 12 explain the choice of the most appropriate average in a range of context. Teachers know their students' capabilities and there is a mutual respect between teachers and pupils. Good relationships are a feature throughout the department and students show a keen interest in their work.
202. There is clear educational vision and the sixth form is managed well. The courses are structured effectively with A and AS-level groups benefiting from the expertise of two teachers. Good practice is shared, contributing to the high standard of teaching. Regular assessment is carried out, results recorded, analysed and the students' achievement monitored closely. Students are kept well informed of their progress and realistic targets are set. Extra lessons beyond the normal college day take place for Year 12, and for students in Year 13 who are studying further mathematics. This is just an example of the shared commitment for success in the work of the department. Accommodation is good and resources are sufficient. There is easy access to ICT facilities.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

Overall, the quality of provision in design and technology is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teacher and student relationships are very good.
- Good support for students.
- Teaching is predominately good.
- The use of ICT is having a positive impact on standards.

Areas for improvement

- Absence rates for some students are high, work is not up to date and progress is adversely affected.
- Provision of a specialist and/or dedicated sixth form teaching base.
- Continuity in teaching.

203. The college offers courses in design and technology leading to examinations at AS and A2 levels. Product design is taught at both A2 and AS levels and food technology was introduced at AS level for the first time in 2002. Lessons were seen for Year 12 AS level, in both product design and food and Year 13 A2-level product design.
204. In the 2002 A-level product design examination four of the ten students entered gained grade B, and the average points score in design and technology was slightly above the overall college average. Disappointingly only two of the eight students entered for AS level in the 2002 examination gained grade C, and the average points score was one half of that for the overall college average. The number of entries has increased steadily since Year 2000; in 2002 the A2 cohort for the first time reached double figures. Six girls were also entered for the first time and one half gained the highest grades A-B. No students have achieved the highest grade A in either the A or AS-levels examinations.

205. The standard of work seen in lessons and in the students' folders is directly linked to their GCSE performance and the amount of effort they are making. Those who attend regularly and keep up to date with their work, including that demanded of them outside lessons, are making good progress. All students following AS product design have achieved grades A*-C at GCSE and are making good progress, which, if maintained, will result in achievement that is at least satisfactory. This was not the case in food technology where standards are extremely variable and some students have been admitted to the course with GCSE performances that are too low.
206. Of the original eight students who took AS-level product design in 2002, only four have continued into Year 13. A scrutiny of students' work shows that most of these students are generally more creative in both presentation and range of design ideas. Students analyse problems to innovate, create and take risks when designing. For example, in a Year 13 lesson, the understanding of the design process with reference to size and lighting systems were quite well developed. This work involved the understanding of electronic circuitry and construction of a mechanism to rotate the light.
207. The impact of ICT and use of the Internet are beginning to show in standards, presentation of work and depth of research. The recently acquired CAD (Computer Assisted Drawing) software and CAM (Computer Assisted Manufacture) equipment will enable the control aspects of design and manufacture to be developed.
208. Teaching in the sixth form is rarely less than good and sometimes better. In all the lessons seen teachers know the students well and teacher-student relationships are often good or very good. These good lessons are planned to a high standard and have suitable challenge enabling students to move to a fuller and deeper level of understanding through a series of well-timed teacher interventions. For example, in a Year 12 food technology lesson and 'food hygiene'. Here the students were presented with a range of potentially hazardous situations both in the preparation and storage of food; good reference was made to commercial practice. Teacher planning was very good and included the teacher volunteering to 'dress-up' in an outfit suitable for commercial use. The students remained on task throughout and responded well to the touches of humour from the teacher.
209. Some teachers clearly show high levels of individual expertise; for example, in a Year 12 product design lesson, where students were producing quite innovative 'improvement' solutions to a range of manufactured items, one student had produced a quick-release solution to the fixing and tensioning device on an engineer's hacksaw.
210. Links with commercial and educational institutions are good and used to extend learning opportunities; for example, master classes held after college at Edge Hill and the Jaguar F1 model racing car competition in which the college reached the regional finals.
211. Students' work is marked and the quality and usefulness of teacher's comments are helpful. Students know and understand their standards of attainment and, more importantly, what aspects they need to concentrate on to improve. There is much more emphasis needed, however, on students taking responsibility for their own learning and becoming independent scholars. The amount of work produced by some students out of class is extremely limited and with high levels of absence for certain students, progress is seriously affected.
212. Procedures for monitoring independent work are not rigorous enough across the teams of teachers who deliver the individual courses. There is a need for all teachers involved

in the delivery of the courses to meet more formally and agree the levels of guidance provided for each student. This would also address to some extent the analogy whereupon final examination results were in some instances at least one grade below individual coursework elements.

213. Leadership and management of both courses are satisfactory. Very little reference was made to the sixth form in the previous report and any comparison would, therefore, be invalid. Different rooms are used by the teachers, which on occasions do not have any reference materials readily available. Although the department is extremely flexible in sharing such resources, opportunities and time are wasted. The range and quality of resources are limited.

BUSINESS

Overall, the quality of provision in business studies is **good**.

Strengths

- Teachers are enthusiastic, have relevant industrial experience and work well together as a team.
- Planning is thorough and the department has the potential for further continuous improvement.
- Teachers are very helpful to students, who are positive in their attitudes to the subject.
- Teachers are very keen to improve and develop a wider range of teaching strategies.

Areas for improvement

- The proportion of students achieving top grades in examinations.
- Links with the local business community.
- Accommodation for business classes.

214. Two business courses are offered in the sixth form, AVCE and GCE A-level, and they are both increasing in popularity. Examination entries have been small, and results over the last three years have broadly been in line with national averages. However, smaller proportions of students achieve higher grades; for example, in 2002, 12 per cent gained A or B grades, lower than national comparators and college predictions based on GCSE grades. Results from 2002 for AS examination show an improvement with 40 per cent gaining the top two grades.

215. Students' work seen in lessons and in their files shows that standards are usually good and at least satisfactory. Standards of work, particularly from students in Year 13, are good. A minority of students show high levels of achievement. They are able to apply business concepts such as investment appraisal and elasticity to a range of contexts, and their files are comprehensive and well ordered. They show a good understanding of the need for financial record keeping, while students in Year 12 appear to be less confident in applying business concepts to real world contexts. Teachers had to work hard to get students to appreciate the direct links between effective communication, efficient production and company profits. The standard of some of the written work of Year 12 AVCE students is below that which would be expected of students on advanced programmes.

216. Students in both years were positive about business studies in what they learned and how they are taught. They also believe that the subject is very useful as a direct preparation for further study and employment and as an aid to understanding contemporary events. Teaching is good and business courses are well planned. For AVCE there is good sequencing of activities to build up students' competence to complete assignments. Teachers are well qualified, both academically and vocationally, and are very anxious to continue to improve their planning and organisation of learning. This has resulted in improved results in the new AS examination in 2002. Good use is made of complementary teacher skills and experience to extend and develop students' responses. The meanings and applications of business concepts are clearly communicated, but opportunities to translate assessment objectives into practical advice to enable students to improve their grades are not always taken. Teachers are always very approachable and support is readily offered to students. Marking of work is thorough, although some of the written feedback could be expanded. Students are encouraged to take part in activities such as Young Enterprise, and last year a team from the college received an award for their presentation skills. Other industrial and commercial links are less well developed, depriving students and staff of further enriching the vocational aspect of business courses.
217. Leadership and management of the department are good and characterised by a high level of teamwork and good collaborative working relationships between teachers. Staff are encouraged to attend courses to further develop their planning and organisational skills. The department has great potential in developing its capabilities to further raise standards and ensure that provision meets the needs of a wider range of students. Intermediate level business courses are not available in the sixth form and entry requirements for those taking advanced level courses are too low.
218. Responsibility for business courses is shared between the vocational and technology departments. This organisational structure does not provide the most effective leadership or make the best use of different teacher expertise to further improve standards and enhance the contribution of the vocational curriculum.
219. Although there are shortages of texts, teaching resources are being built up. Accommodation is badly in need of a facelift. Rooms are cramped, and have not been decorated since 1989. Staff have worked to make the best of these difficult circumstances.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in ICT is **very good**.

Strengths

- Results in AVCE courses in 2002 were well above national levels.
- Curriculum organisation and assessment methods help to develop students' independent learning, as they can access all their course material from the college Intranet
- Teaching is consistently good.
- Teachers have good relationships with students, who are interested and committed to the subject.
- AVCE courses are very popular with students, with increasing numbers enrolling each year.

Areas for improvement

- There are no identified areas for improvement.

220. Results of AVCE ICT in 2002 were well above national levels, showing that there was very good achievement by these students.

221. The standards of work seen in Years 12 and 13 are above average. In Year 12 students use a variety of skills in the presenting information unit of work. They show good understanding of the modelling capabilities of spreadsheets, and understand the importance of effective display of spreadsheets. They make use of more complex formulae to work out profit and loss in business accounts. Students make good use of their ICT skills in word-processing, publishing to create a variety of documents for their coursework. Year 13 students have completed a unit of web page design, making use of a variety of software. Students have selected a variety of topics ranging from St Helens Rugby League team to TV programmes, and use programming language of Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML) and Java, as well as word-processing and desktop publishing software. In the present unit of work, students have created virtual calculators making very good use of visual basic programming, which is new for all students.

222. Teaching is good. Teachers make very effective use of their very good technical subject knowledge and examination requirements to give clear explanations to students. This is very effective in helping students to learn new skills and increase their understanding in the subject. There are very good relationships between students and teachers and in all classes there is a positive working atmosphere. Students show maturity and independence and an awareness of what they need to do to achieve good results. Lessons are very well planned, particularly in examination classes where the syllabuses are divided into a series of wallets. These wallets are extremely well prepared, with notes and tasks, which effectively prepare students to complete their coursework. All prepared wallets are available on the college Intranet as well as being available in hard copy, allowing students to work at their own level. The assessment scheme is excellent; as students complete a wallet, their work is marked, and comments are added. Students can access their marks from the Intranet and work on specific wallets to meet examination requirements. At the start of lessons, both teachers and students can set targets, making use of these online assessments. Teachers make very effective use of technology with the Intranet and use of data projectors and interactive white boards, which are effective in helping pupils to understand processes, when they can see them clearly displayed.

223. In all lessons students make good progress as they learn new skills and reinforce existing ones. Achievement is good, particularly for those students in both Years 12 and 13 who have not taken an examination course in Year 11, and, therefore, they have had to learn many new, higher level skills for these advanced courses.
224. Very good progress has been made since the last inspection, with the provision of new computers and an effective Intranet to support students' independent learning. AVCE courses have been introduced, with considerable success in both examination results and the take-up of courses by students.
225. The department is very well led and managed, with a highly qualified team of dedicated teachers and support staff. Courses are particularly well structured along with an excellent assessment scheme available to students on the college Intranet. The quality of advanced vocational education provided by the department is recognised by the Greater Merseyside Learning and Skills Council, as an example of good practice.
226. Students are able to qualify for Key Skills awards through a discrete course leading to Level 2 Key Skills ICT. Students taking AVCE courses are exempt from Key Skills lessons, but as a result of the ICT courses they are following can be awarded a Level 3 Key Skills in ICT

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Overall, the provision in physical education is **excellent**.

Strengths

- Leadership and management are excellent.
- Teachers have excellent knowledge and use a very good range of teaching styles to ensure that students learn very effectively.
- Standards overall are very good.
- Relationships between staff and students are very positive.
- The provision for extra-curricular activities and the successes of individuals and teams are outstanding.

Areas for improvement

- Objectives should be made clearer in lesson planning.
- Further opportunity should be provided for students to work independently.

227. Standards achieved by students taking A-level physical education in the past three years have been very good. In 2002 they were above the national average with all students gaining A-E grades. The percentage of students gaining A or B grades was broadly in line with the national average. Students make very good progress and results show that students achieve significantly better in physical education than in the other subjects that they take.
228. The standards of work seen are very good in theory lessons and excellent in practical games lessons. In Year 12 anatomy and physiology the standards are very good. Students have very good knowledge of the effects of exercise on the heart and can relate workload intensity to cardiac output and stroke volume. They understand the pathway of blood through the heart and have very good knowledge of appropriate vocabulary. They have good knowledge of the effects of funding on the development of excellence in sport. In Year 13 students make very good links between theory and practical work to show very good knowledge of the characteristics of teams and groups. Students in Years 12 and 13 have the opportunity to join Year 11 in a weekly

games afternoon. The standards seen in a sixth form rugby lesson were exceptional. The students form the basis of the first XV, which competes nationally against state and independent schools with consistent and excellent success. The college offers both rugby league and rugby union and several of the students have signed professional terms with St Helens RLFC.

229. The quality of teaching and learning is never less than good and is excellent in the majority of lessons. Teachers have excellent knowledge and use a very good range of teaching styles, which ensures that students learn very effectively. Teachers plan lessons very effectively with clear progression, and prepare excellent handouts and workbooks. Relationships are excellent, with teachers and students showing mutual respect. Teaching is excellent in Year 12 anatomy and physiology. The quality of preparation, teaching methods and excellent teacher knowledge ensure that students make extremely good progress. Tasks are very challenging and excellent links are made between theory and practice. In Year 13 psychology of sport the objectives are very clear and tasks are very well planned to be enjoyable and enable students to make excellent progress. Teaching in rugby lessons is excellent. The exceptional standards are as a result of excellent teacher knowledge and commitment to maintaining the traditionally outstanding status of the game at national level.
230. Students in all lessons display attitudes and behaviour that are at least very good; mainly excellent. They are keen to learn, listen well and work hard in all lessons. They work very effectively in pairs and groups and show outstanding physical effort in practical team activities. Students have very positive views of the subject and are very respectful of teachers' knowledge and commitment. Resources for the subject are plentiful.
231. Leadership and management are excellent. Procedures for assessing the progress of students are excellent and students are very aware of how well they are doing. The provision for extra-curricular activities is exceptional and the college teams have outstanding success in local, regional and national competitions. The department benefits from very good additional support from many non-specialist teachers who help during games sessions. The commitment of many of these staff to the very extensive extra-curricular programme is first rate and they give freely of their time after lessons and at the weekend. Opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy skills are good. For example, in a Year 12 anatomy and physiology lesson, students plot and analyse graphs to represent sub-maximal and maximal heart rates. Students use the Internet for research into various topics. They participate very well in discussions, and higher attaining students produce very good files showing excellent standards of knowledge. The overall use of relevant vocabulary is excellent.
232. Since the previous inspection the numbers of students taking A-level have increased and standards have improved.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The inspection team visited a few art lessons.

233. Overall provision for art in the sixth form is very good. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. Teaching is never less than good, often very good, and learning outcomes reflect very effective support and target setting. Much of the work shows originality of response and high quality drawing and painting skills. Independent learning skills lead to research and experimentation that is prolific in some cases and results in the emergence of strong personal styles. Students are enthusiastic, self-

critical, hard working and appreciative of a department that provides good support and guidance when needed.

234. With the exception of the higher grades that fell below national average this year, examination results at A-level have been consistently above national averages in recent years.

HUMANITIES

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- The standards of attainment at GCE A-level have risen in recent years.
- Students are interested and enjoy the subject.
- Teaching is good.
- Good quality learning resources.

Area for improvement

- Increasing the number of higher grades at A-level standard.

235. Three candidates were entered for GCE A-level in 2002 with a range of grades between A and D. The average points score for the subject was the third highest of those studied for A-level. Of the seven candidates at AS level in 2002, three obtained a B grade.
236. Standards of work in Year 13 are close to those expected nationally and reflect the A-level results of 2002. Analysis of the work of students indicates a thorough and detailed coverage of all study units, although essential note making skills, such as indexing, cross referencing and pagination, require further development. Writing skills are gradually refined so that by the time students are half way through Year 13 they are producing balanced and well-structured essays containing a sound analysis of relevant factors. In their work on the 16th century, students acquire a satisfactory level of understanding of the complex theological issues involved in the Counter Reformation; they are able to explain both orally and in their notes and essays the meaning of difficult terms such as 'predestination' and 'justification by faith'. In their studies on the 20th century, they have a broad understanding of the main features of Nazi Germany, but need to give more consideration to the ideas underpinning the regime.
237. Students demonstrate a very mature attitude to their studies. They are keen to learn and wish to achieve the highest A-level grades of which they are capable. Year 12 students have adapted readily to the demands of A-level work. Retention rates are good; of the eight students who began the AS-level course in 2001 only one did not complete the A2-level course in 2002.
238. The overall quality of teaching is good. Teachers have a secure knowledge base for A-level teaching. Students' ideas and contributions are skilfully woven into the presentation of material. Theological issues and debates were clearly and coherently explained in a Year 13 lesson. In another Year 13 lesson, there was a marked concern on the part of the teacher to ensure that students gained the close knowledge and understanding of political and social matters in America during the 1920s. Teachers have high expectations; relationships with students are very good. They are based on mutual respect and a shared sense of humour.

239. Discussions with students in both years indicate a general enjoyment of the subject. Students are pleased with the standard of teaching that they receive and with the assessment and marking of their work. Some of those in Year 12 appreciate being able to study a wider chronological span than was the case for GCSE.
240. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Teachers are well qualified in the subject. Learning resources are very good, especially as regards the variety of texts that the students are able to use when studying 16th-century Europe.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Good leadership that is driving up standards.
- Very good relationships that inspire trust and respect.
- Good achievement by the students because of good teaching and learning.

Area for improvement

- Increased challenge to motivate and excite the students both in lessons and to encourage independent learning.
- Class sizes to enable wide and varied discussion.

241. Results in the 2001 GCE A-level English language and literature and English literature examinations indicate standards that were below the national average overall. These figures are based on small numbers, however, and results for 2002 indicate improvements in all subjects at A and AS-levels. Trends over time are inconsistent, but generally, standards have been maintained. The retention rate is average.
242. Students' attainment in lessons is average. Their ability on entry was below average and they have made good progress. Most students have a secure knowledge and understanding of their work. Their oral skills are good in classroom discussion, but falter when speaking in formal situations. Students make valid and cogent observation and use technical vocabulary in their writing. Evaluative and critical writing is a problem for many students, largely because their independent research skills are undeveloped. Some students, particularly in Year 12, cannot make sophisticated inferences from texts or sustain detailed textual analysis. Recent initiatives are beginning to redress writing problems by careful selection of reading texts and more variety in writing assignments.
243. The study of a wide range of texts deepens students' understanding of literature, but not all lesson planning allows for students to have the opportunity to air their views and develop their independent learning. When lessons are planned to include well-prepared student contributions, their comments are sharp and sensitive. Students respond positively to their teachers and each other.

244. The quality of teaching and learning is good and includes some teaching and learning that is very good. All teachers are knowledgeable in their field. In the good and very good lessons there is a brisk pace, students are clearly motivated and a large amount of work is completed. Students enjoy their work with each other and their teacher in an atmosphere of achievement and respect. In a Year 13 lesson on comparative literature the students enjoyed comparing and contrasting the characters from the novels '1984' and 'The Handmaid's Tale' because of the teacher's planning to include variety, interest and a fast pace. The concept of 'Big Brother' and torture in a historical context deepened students' moral and social understanding as well as furthering their learning.
245. Students appreciate the opportunity to receive one-to-one attention and help from their teacher, especially the lower attaining students who have not grasped subtle text distinctions. Group discussion is limited when there is not full attendance in an already small class. In this case the teacher tries to extend and deepen the discussion, but students flounder and rely on the teacher for illumination. This is because small numbers of students cannot represent a wide range of views and they are over reliant on the teacher for answers. The teacher's insistence on the use of analysis and explanation is beginning to improve standards. In a good Year 13 examination preparation lesson the teacher took advantage of the trust and good humour of relationships to engage the students in a well structured, thoughtful discussion tightly focused on syllabus requirements. Small numbers prevented challenging debate and students were dependent on the teacher for developing questions and challenge. In satisfactory lessons students learnt marginally less because of a more pedestrian pace and lengthy exposition by the teacher.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Overall, the quality of provision in modern foreign languages is **good**.

Strengths

- Access to a wide range of language opportunities including mandatory study of a language in Year 12 reflecting the ethos of the Language College.
- Quality of teaching is at least good, leading to substantial progress being made by students.
- Very competent language specialists in all subject areas.

Areas for improvement

- Increased emphasis to students' oral skills to increase their confidence to speak unprompted.
- Numbers of students on AS and A-level courses.
- Use of the range of resources including TV/video and ICT facilities.

246. The standards reached by students are in line with average expectations in AS/A-level courses in French and German and similarly in the GCSE Italian course. In the non-accredited languages, attainment is satisfactory in Spanish and Russian, but very good in Chinese. Students on AS and A-level courses in French and German have a solid grasp of grammar and cope well with spoken or written texts, but are reticent in oral discussion and rarely express opinions in the foreign language. Whereas their written work is accurate, it lacks sufficient depth, and when speaking, students tend not to offer extended answers. Students on the GCSE Italian course make good progress, but are inhibited by the limited time available for regular contact with the language as required by the examination. In Russian and Spanish, comprehension is sound, but spoken language is weaker overall. In Chinese, students' spoken language is admirable with good attention to correct pronunciation and tone and they have high levels of

comprehension. Results in AS and A-level, in French and German do not show any substantial improvement over time where overall grades A-E are close to national averages, but results are below average in the number of higher A/B grades. Teaching in the sixth form is always good and sometimes very good. Teachers are all very competent linguists who plan their lessons well and are enthusiastic about their subject. Lessons are delivered with clarity and teachers have established a very good rapport with their students. In the best lessons pace is particularly brisk, questioning is challenging and students are prepared to use strategies for identifying information from text and working things out for themselves. However, in many lessons students are reluctant to initiate the foreign language and tend to remain passive unless prompted. The quality of written documentation used is good, but more use could be made of TV/video and the wide range of other resources available to stimulate learning. Students' written work is carefully marked, detailing areas for improvement and setting clear targets.

247. Students' attitudes to their learning are very good overall. They enjoy their studies, appreciate the help given by their teachers are attentive at all times. They do, and however, show a lack of confidence in producing the foreign language for their own purpose.
248. Management of the department and its sixth form provision is very good. The exceptional curriculum opportunities, which offer study of a total of six foreign languages, are a reflection of the commitment of the head of department and her staff to the philosophy of the Language College initiative. The large numbers of students enjoying starter language courses in Year 12 is a welcome development, but a clear priority must also be to improve the low take-up at AS and A-levels if the objectives of the Language College development plan are to be fully met.