

INSPECTION REPORT

**SIDNEY STRINGER COMMUNITY
TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE**

Coventry

LEA area: Coventry

Unique reference number: 103739

Headteacher: Brian Worrall

Reporting inspector: Tom Comer
15109

Dates of inspection: 12th – 15th February 2001

Inspection number: 197247

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE

Type of college: Comprehensive

College category: Community

Age range of students: 11 to 18

Gender of students: Mixed

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Anne Tyrrell

Date of previous inspection: 29th April 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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10385	K. Hopkins	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Design and technology	
21864	F. C. Martin	Team inspector	Provision for students with special educational needs	
25744	T. Osgerby	Team inspector	History	
20124	J. Peach	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
3731	W. G. Robson	Team inspector	English	
30901	S. G. Schofield	Team inspector	Art and design	
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14516	A. Skelton	Team inspector	Religious education	
19055	E. O. Statham	Team inspector	Provision for students with English as an additional language	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE

Sidney Stringer Community Technology College is a city-centre secondary school which educates 955 girls and boys, including 91 in the sixth form. The Hillfields neighbourhood of the college is affected by severe social and economic hardship though conditions are improving. The proportion of students entitled to a free school meal is well above average. Nearly three-quarters of the students are from ethnic minority backgrounds, another 34 are refugees, and nearly all of these students have English as an additional language, including 53 at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of students with special educational needs is above the national average. Test results of the annual intake of 11-year-old students are well below average, especially reading test scores, and have declined in recent years.

HOW GOOD THE COLLEGE IS

This is an effective school which provides a good standard of education. Students achieve well by the age of 16 in relation to their low starting points at age 11. This is because of good leadership and good teaching, though improvements can still be made. The college cares very well for its students, runs efficiently and gives sound value for money.

What the college does well

- The headteacher and senior staff have established a good climate for learning.
- The teaching is good at GCSE and in the sixth form.
- The students' GCSE results are good in information and communication technology (ICT), art and design, and drama.
- The college looks after the students very well.
- The students' personal qualities are well developed.
- The range of extra-curricular activities is very good.

What could be improved

- The consistency of the implementation of the college's strategy for literacy in all subjects.
- The college lacks a strategy for teaching numeracy in all subjects.
- The consistency of the setting of homework, marking of written work and the match of work to the full range of attainment in lessons.
- The effectiveness of the monitoring of teaching and learning by the subject faculty heads.

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

HOW THE COLLEGE HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Overall, this is satisfactory. Though the GCSE results in 2000 were lower than they were at the time of the previous inspection in May 1996, this matches a gradual decline in the attainment of the annual intakes of Year 7 students. The headteacher and senior staff are taking vigorous action to raise the examination results. The college has made satisfactory overall progress with the issues raised at the time of the previous inspection. The monitoring and action to improve attendance have improved and are now excellent. Teaching has improved, particularly in mathematics and religious education.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	E	D	E	C
A-levels/AS-levels	E	E	E	

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

Standards of work of the 11- 14 year old students

By age 14, standards of work seen were well below average overall, but the students, including those with learning difficulties and whose first language is not English make satisfactory overall progress and their achievement is satisfactory. The English test results were unusually low in Summer 2000, and were in the bottom five per cent of all schools. The mathematics and science results were higher than those in English but were still well below average. The girls generally achieve higher standards than the boys.

Standards of work of the 14-16 year old students

By age 16, students' standards of work are below average overall, though the students are achieving well in relation to their starting point at the age of 14. The GCSE results in 2000 were well below the national average and did not meet the governors' target. However, the results were in line with those of similar schools. Girls' results are better than those of the boys. Standards of work are below average in English and well below average in mathematics and science. The strongest subject at GCSE is ICT, in which the examination results and current standards are well above average. Standards are average in design and technology, art and design, and drama, and students tend to achieve higher standards in these than in other subjects.

Standards of work of the sixth-form students

In 2000, the A-level results were in the lowest five per cent of all schools. It is clear that a number of students took A-level courses which were too difficult for them or for which they were otherwise unsuited. The current standards of work in the sixth form are average and are good in relation to the students' starting points. Standards are above average in ICT and average in English, science subjects, art and design. Standards are average in vocational courses leading to GNVQ. Standards are below average in mathematics but the students are making satisfactory progress.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the college	Good. The students enjoy school. They are keen to succeed and many take advantage of extra lessons, clubs and games after school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. The vast majority of students behave well though a few can be difficult and inclined to misbehave. Exclusions have declined to a rate similar to the national average.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are very good between students and between them and their teachers. This is a happy, harmonious and well-integrated school. Students learn to accept responsibility in various ways; for example, as School Council members.
Attendance	Well below average but has improved over the past six months. Low attendance is partly due to the community's religious holidays and also to extended family visits abroad. Rates of unauthorised absence are also very high but declining.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Satisfactory	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 teaching is good overall. Fourteen per cent of the lessons were excellent or very good, 45 per cent were good and another 38 per cent were satisfactory. Three per cent of lessons were unsatisfactory but there was no poor or very poor teaching. The teaching is better in the sixth form and in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7-9. The students' learning and progress are clearly linked to the quality of teaching. The teaching of students with special educational needs and for those with English as an additional language is good overall. The teaching of English, mathematics and science is satisfactory in Years 7-9. In Years 10-11; English and science teaching are good and the teaching of mathematics is satisfactory. In general, the main strengths of the teaching are the teachers' good command of their subjects and their effective discipline. The best subjects are ICT, art and design, and drama, at GCSE. The teaching of literacy is inconsistent and the college lacks a coherent strategy to develop numeracy in all subjects. The teaching meets the needs of all students but there are inconsistencies, especially in Years 7, 8 and 9, in the effectiveness of the matching of work to the range of attainment in the class, in the setting of homework and the marking of written work.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE COLLEGE

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum meets legal requirements. Careers education is excellent and there is a good programme of work-related education in Years 10 and 11. The range of extra-curricular activities is very good.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Satisfactory. These students generally follow the same courses as others.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Good and well organised. Students at an early stage of learning English make good progress and quickly join mainstream classes.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall, though the college does not fulfil its obligations with regard to collective worship. Provision for moral development is excellent and the students' social development is very good. Students' cultural development is good.
How well the college cares for its students	Very good. The form tutors, year and house heads take vigorous action to improve attendance and they could hardly do more. They monitor students' behaviour and progress effectively and set targets for all students.
How well the college works in partnership with parents	Reports to parents could be improved. The school does a great deal to foster a constructive partnership with parents though it does not always have their full co-operation over attendance.

HOW WELL THE COLLEGE IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The college is well led and soundly managed. The headteacher and senior staff are working hard to raise standards. The monitoring of teaching and learning by the subject faculty heads is inconsistent.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. Legal requirements are met except for those for collective worship. Financial management is effective. The governors are aware of the college's strengths and weaknesses.
The college's evaluation of its performance	Good. The headteacher and senior staff compare the examination results with those of other schools. The performance management of individual staff is rigorous.
The strategic use of resources	The number of support staff for students with special needs and for those with English as an additional language is barely adequate. Resources are good except for music. The cost of educating a student is above average but money is spent appropriately and wisely, always achieving sound value. The sixth form, though small, is efficient.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE COLLEGE

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Their children make good progress.• The teaching is good.• Expectations are high.• The school is well led.• Their children like school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Their partnership with the college.• Homework.• Progress reports could be better.

The inspectors agree with the parents' positive views and also agree with parents that homework and reports could be improved. The inspectors consider that the school does what it should to establish a good partnership with parents.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The college's results and students' achievements

1. The students' overall attainment is well below average at the beginning of Year 7, as indicated by the results of National Curriculum tests and of other standardised tests administered by the college. The proportion of the intake with English as an additional language is very high. The mobility rate of the students is also high, reflecting the high rate of transience in the neighbourhood; therefore, a significant number of students leave and join the college mid-year or part-way through their examination courses. A greater proportion of the boys than of the girls have special educational needs and this is reflected in their results.

Results and achievements of Year 9 students (14-year-olds)

2. The results of the National Curriculum tests for 14-year-olds, taken at the end of Year 9, are well below average. They were well below average in comparison with all secondary schools in each of the four years 1997-2000. Performance over the four-year period was well below the national average in English, mathematics and science. In 2000, the results for each subject were well below average and, in the case of English, they were unusually low and were in the lowest five per cent of all schools. In previous years, the English results were better. The teachers' own assessments of the students' attainment in English, which are consistently accurate, were much higher than the test results, and are considered to be more reliable in this instance.

3. On the basis of entitlement to a free school meal, the results were below average overall, when compared with those of similar schools. They were well below average in English and science but above average in mathematics. The trend of improvement of the test results is upward over the four-year period 1997-2000, but less than that found nationally. Boys' results are lower than those of the girls in a similar way to the national picture.

4. The standards of work of Year 9 students seen during the inspection are well below average overall. They are well below average in English and science. In mathematics, standards are higher than in English and science but are still below average. However, in relation to the students' very low attainment on entry to Year 7, their achievements are satisfactory. Standards are above average in ICT, which is the strongest subject, and average in art and design, physical education and religious education. Standards are below average in music and students' progress is adversely affected because many instruments are in poor condition, and because the teachers need to place more emphasis on performance skills. Standards are below average in other subjects, but students make satisfactory progress.

Results and achievements of Year 11 students (16-year-olds)

5. Overall, the GCSE examination results were well below the national average in 2000 though they were in line with those of similar schools. The results were lower than they were at the time of the previous inspection though they fluctuate considerably from year to year. In 2000, the results were considerably below the governors' target of 35 per cent of students to achieve grades A*-C in five or more subjects, though this was achieved in 1999. Girls' results are better than those of the boys. The results for English, mathematics and science were well below the national average for each subject. GCSE results are well above average in ICT, and average in art and design, and drama. They are below or well below average in other subjects.

6. Standards in the current Year 11 are below average overall, though the students

make good progress and, because the teaching is good, they achieve well in relation to their well below average starting points at the end of Year 9.

7. Standards of work are below average in English and mathematics but are still well below average in science. The students achieve their highest standards in ICT, in which they are well above average. Standards of work are average in art and design, drama, physical education and religious education. They are below average in English literature, design and technology, geography, history and music. They are well below average in modern languages, though the students make satisfactory progress.

Results and achievements of the sixth-form students

8. In 2000, the A-level results were in the lowest five per cent of all schools and were lower than at the time of the previous inspection. Many of the students did well but a number also failed their examinations and it is clear that some students entered for A-level courses which were too difficult for them or for which they were otherwise unsuited. In the past, the college followed an over-generous policy of entry to sixth-form courses. This has now changed and, in their best interests, students are subjected to a much more rigorous selection process for entry to A-level courses.

9. The current standards of work in the sixth form are broadly average, and are good in relation to the students' starting points at the beginning of Year 12. They are very much better than might be expected given the A-level results of 2000. Standards are average in English, science, and art and design. Though standards are below average in mathematics, the students are working well and are making good progress. The standards of Year 12 students taking GNVQ courses are in line with those expected for success.

Students with special educational needs

10. The overall progress of students with special educational needs is satisfactory. When they are withdrawn from class, or supported in class by teachers and learning support assistants, their progress is good but in some lessons, the work set for them is not at the right level. In some other lessons, a lack of support results in slower progress.

Students with English as an additional language

11. Students for whom English is an additional language make good progress when taught in small groups as part of an intensive programme to develop their English and literacy skills. However, the college is presently finding difficulty in filling vacant posts and consequently a lack of support in some lessons adversely affects progress.

Key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT

12. Students' standards of literacy on entry to Year 7 are very low. Although they improve through the school they still have a negative impact on standards in several subjects. In mathematics, for example, many pupils are unable to express mathematical ideas precisely in discussions or in writing. Weak spelling and grammar pull down overall standards and some students have difficulty writing correctly in sentences, as seen in science. Some students' reading skills are just sufficient for them to understand texts in most subjects. Teachers are usually aware of students' needs and the college has a clear strategy for literacy but this is not consistently implemented across subjects.

13. Standards of numeracy on entry to Year 7 are very low and similar to those of literacy. The students' weaknesses in numeracy are tackled well in mathematics lessons so that students learn the necessary numerical skills demanded of other subjects. However, the college has no clear written strategy for developing numeracy in other subjects. In consequence, the contributions other subjects could make to the students' development in numeracy, especially science and geography, are inadequate.

14. Students' ICT skills are well developed and are well above average because the college has invested much time and energy into teaching them. Nevertheless, the students' skills could be exploited even more effectively in some subjects, especially design and technology.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

15. The previous inspection found that students had positive attitudes to school and this continues to be the case. The majority are well motivated and keen to succeed in their work. They come to school in a positive frame of mind and are keen to benefit from the increasingly wide range of opportunities they are offered. During lessons, as well as during less formal situations, students relate well to one another and with their teachers. They are good company and are helpful and polite towards visitors.

16. Students respect one another's beliefs, cultures and backgrounds. Students from all ethnic backgrounds mix freely and all races and religions are equally respected and valued. Students work well together in pairs or small groups and readily offer help if someone is unsure of what they are doing. Teachers plan classwork carefully and students' response to homework is good. Students do their best and their work is usually neat and tidy. They listen well and enjoy a good rapport with their teachers. Students feel confident about asking for help when it is needed and they usually concentrate well. These attitudes help to create a stable atmosphere within which the majority of students are keen to learn and to make progress.

17. Students' behaviour during lessons and around the college is good overall. Members of staff set good examples of how to behave and the college pursues a very effective policy of mixing high expectations with positive reinforcement. Students know exactly what is expected and the result is a lively and harmonious community. Although they are often noisy at the start of lessons, the students can usually be relied upon to settle down quickly and to undertake practical work sensibly and safely. A small number of younger students are inclined to misbehave on occasions when the work set is not well matched to their abilities and the tasks set are of little interest to them.

18. The college has sharply reduced the number of permanent exclusions. During the school year immediately preceding the inspection, there were seven permanent exclusions. During the term immediately preceding the inspection, however, there were none at all. The number of fixed period exclusions has also fallen and is now similar to the national average. Students with identified behavioural difficulties respond very well to the consistent support of the teachers and learning support assistants. Close and effective co-operation with the local authority services enables the gradual reintroduction of excluded pupils to the college.

19. Students' personal development is good. The college is keen to provide an increasingly wide range of opportunities in which students of all ages are encouraged to use their initiative and to assume responsibility within the school. To this end, a student council has recently been established and representatives from each class canvass opinion prior to each council meeting. Students respond very positively and appreciate being given a voice in the running of the college. Students play a large part in deciding upon their personal and

academic targets and these are recorded in their personal organisers.

20. The previous inspection found attendance to be unsatisfactory and it is still well below average. Despite the best efforts of the college staff, the level of unauthorised absence also continues to be above the national average. Poor individual attendance has a substantial effect on many students' overall progress. Attendance at each of the six main contributing primary schools is also below the national average and the college receives many students with an established pattern of irregular attendance. White boys make up the largest single group amongst those who have attendance below 85 per cent.

21. Over the last six months, however, the college has improved the effectiveness of monitoring attendance in all lessons and, as a result of vigorous action, attendance has improved markedly and the average figure for the autumn term has risen to just over 90 per cent. Absence is often due to illness, observation of religious festivals, and extended visits to family abroad. The college is working hard to emphasise the importance of regular attendance to parents and has managed to reduce the amount of term-time holiday by around 30 per cent. Long-term trips abroad, however, still account for around one quarter of all absence.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

22. The teaching is good overall. The teaching is better in the sixth form and in Years 10 and 11, where it is good, than in Years 7-9, where it is satisfactory. The students' learning is clearly linked to the quality of teaching; students make satisfactory progress in Years 7-9 and good progress in Years 10-11 and the sixth form.

23. Of the 159 lessons observed during the inspection, 14 per cent were excellent or very good, 45 per cent were good and another 38 per cent were satisfactory. A small number of lessons in Years 7-9, three per cent of all lessons, were unsatisfactory but there was no poor teaching.

24. In general, the teaching meets the needs of all pupils well. Students with English as an additional language are well taught and make good progress when taught in small groups as part of an intensive programme to develop their English and literacy skills.

25. Teaching of students with special educational needs is satisfactory in Years 7-9 and good in Years 10 and 11. The students' individual education plans are readily available to the teachers. When students are withdrawn from lessons to the learning support centre for individual teaching of literacy, they are well taught by specialist staff. A very good team of learning support assistants work effectively with individual pupils when they are withdrawn from lessons and in class.

26. The college has a clear strategy for teaching literacy but there is a lack of consistency in the development of skills in the different subjects. The teaching of key vocabulary is the most effective practice. Key words are displayed in most classrooms and are reinforced through class discussion. This is not enough, however, to overcome early disadvantage in literacy and there is a lack of drive to raise the quality of written work, and opportunities are missed to improve students' reading and comprehension skills. Only religious education lessons provide regular opportunities for doing so. Geography, history and science teachers provide structured guidance to help the students in their writing; however, insufficient emphasis is placed on the correction of spellings and grammar in most subjects. Even when teachers mark spelling errors they rarely insist on students correcting them afterwards and pupils often repeat the same mistake.

27. Students' numeracy skills are also a weakness at the beginning of Year 7. Though standards improve steadily and these skills are taught well in mathematics lessons, the college lacks a coherent strategy to develop and apply numerical knowledge through the teaching of other subjects, such as science, design and technology and geography.

28. Computers are used to good effect in mathematics lessons, for example, to revise factorisation in algebra, extending the students' work in the computer room after school. The students' ICT skills are very impressive and could be exploited to raise standards further; for example, in GCSE design and technology coursework.

29. The teaching of English is satisfactory in Years 7-9. In Years 10-11 and in the sixth form, it is good. English teaching has many good features but the work set is sometimes too easy for the higher attaining students.

30. The teaching of mathematics is satisfactory in Years 7-11 and good in the sixth form. Mathematics teaching has improved since the previous inspection. Mathematics lessons have an appropriate emphasis on the basic skills of numeracy and lessons are often practical and based on the students' everyday experiences. This increases their motivation. Sixth-form students enjoy the subject and are enthusiastic, even those who find it difficult.

31. The teaching of science is satisfactory in Years 7-9. In Years 10-11 and the sixth form it is good. In science, students enjoy their work and collaborate well with one another in practical lessons. Different objectives for different groups of students often give a clear focus to their learning; however, in some other lessons, tasks are often the same for students of all attainment levels so that some are not challenged sufficiently. Students make better progress when working individually or in small groups and teachers spend more time helping them to improve. Sometimes, the lesson objectives are not made clear to the students.

32. There are no weak subjects. The best teaching is found in ICT and art and design, in which it is very good, especially for examination classes. It is good in drama, design and technology, geography and physical education. It is satisfactory in history, modern languages and religious education. In music the teaching is satisfactory overall: though the teaching was found to be good in the lessons seen, the development of performance skills needs more emphasis.

33. The overall strengths of the teaching are the teachers' good command of their subjects, their effective discipline and their good relationships with the students.

34. The teachers' secure knowledge of their subjects ensures that students develop their understanding effectively, especially at GCSE and A-level. Even when teachers are not subject specialists, as is often the case in science, geography, history and religious education, good management of the subject planning helps to ensure that the teachers' knowledge is satisfactory. Teachers plan their lessons carefully and ensure that students understand the objectives clearly. At the ends of lessons, students are led to understand what they have achieved. In practical subjects, such as art and design and design and technology, teachers provide high quality advice and individual help, illustrated by clear

examples. Teachers are generous with the time they give to students after school for revision and for GCSE coursework.

35. Teachers manage classes very well, ensuring that students behave well, concentrate and listen carefully during class discussions. Teachers have earned the students' respect and confidence. Relationships between teachers and students are good. Most students are lively young people and their enthusiasm and energy are harnessed productively.

36. The weaknesses in teaching lie in some important inconsistency. Teaching is inconsistent in the matching of work to the range of attainment in the class, in the teaching of literacy, in the setting of homework, and in the marking of written work. More effective monitoring by the faculty heads is essential to improve these matters.

37. The match of work to the full range of attainment in the class is inconsistent and results in a lack of challenge for the higher attaining students. In French, students sometimes find the work too easy or too difficult. In Spanish lessons, this is not the case because teachers always ensure that the work matches the wide range of attainment and therefore meets the needs of all the students. In some mathematics lessons, average and lower attaining students are set tasks that are too demanding for them, and higher attaining students are not always sufficiently challenged. In science, teachers do not always match resources and activities well enough to meet the learning needs of the higher attaining students and, in some lessons, tasks are the same for all students regardless of their attainment levels.

38. There are some inconsistencies in the setting of homework. It is set regularly in most subjects though it is not always recorded in students' planners. Homework extends the students' knowledge and understanding and consolidates the work done in class in many subjects though the amount set is sometimes slight, for example, in geography. In mathematics, homework is set every lesson. In art and design, homework is used effectively to consolidate analytical skills but it would benefit students more if it was used for research and to develop students' independence as learners. Sometimes students do not complete their French homework. In religious education, the setting of homework is inconsistent, especially in Years 10 and 11.

39. All teachers mark students' work regularly but the standard of marking varies. Marking usually evaluates effort and includes encouraging comments but students would benefit from a clearer evaluation of the standard of the work and how it can be further improved. Marking is effective in mathematics but less so in many other subjects.

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

40. Since the previous report, the college has revised the curriculum which now meets all statutory requirements. Overall, the quality and range of learning opportunities are satisfactory throughout the college, with some important strengths. The college places a strong emphasis on equal opportunities and equal worth, with clear aims and principles. All students have access to the full curriculum.

41. In Years 7,8 and 9, the curriculum is broad and balanced and is enhanced by the addition of drama. The teaching time for English has been reduced to give more time for mathematics but this is now under review.

42. In Years 10-11, students all study a common core of nine GCSE subjects, including double science and a short course in ICT. A modified curriculum, introduced this year,

appropriately allows some students to follow work-related courses, involving a significant proportion of work experience.

43. The small number of sixth-form students has meant that the college has difficulty in sustaining the wide subject choice needed to attract students to post-sixteen study. There are seven A-level subjects, mostly in mathematics and science, GCSE English and mathematics courses, and courses in key skills. Students can study GNVQ Intermediate and Advanced Information Technology, and GNVQ Intermediate Leisure and Tourism which has been introduced this year. The college plans to increase the number of vocational courses offered.

44. A comprehensive personal and social education (PSE) programme is taught to all students throughout the college and makes a significant contribution to the students' personal development. Components of a well-planned course include aspects of study skills, safety and citizenship, as well as health, sex and drugs education. Visiting speakers and the use of computer resources enrich this programme.

45. Careers education is excellent. It is taught very well as part of the PSE programme and all students take part in practical work experience. The Record of Achievement is integral to the personal and social education programme and its completion creates opportunities for students to recognise their strengths. Students are prepared effectively for adult life and the course is generally well taught and is valued by the students.

46. The provision for extra-curricular activities during lunchtimes and after school, is very good and these are taken up enthusiastically by students. Sporting activities include hockey, basketball, netball, football, volleyball, trampolining, badminton and girls' soccer and are open to all, regardless of personal skills or standards. Other clubs include a range of music activities, drama, art and design, ICT, cookery and science. Students benefit from revision courses outside normal lesson times in the full range of subjects. There is a flourishing Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. The library is open before and after school and at break and lunchtimes. After lessons there is a programme of activities for each week, including games, videos, storytelling and the production of a college newspaper. Teachers remain to help students with their homework, presentation skills and spelling. The college rewards students for participation in extra-curricular activities. Students take part in outside visits; for example, to theatres, museums and universities.

47. The school has established constructive links with its wider community which greatly benefit the students. A student-mentoring scheme helps students to realise their full potential in GCSE courses. Mentors come from a wide variety of local firms and organisations and are trained and supervised by the Careers Officer. The college has many links with local employers, including students' work experience, and these links have a positive impact on students' personal and social development. Some poor attenders in Years 10-11 follow work-based programmes, which involve them for a larger proportion of their time with local employers. This year, Year 10 students visited many local industrial concerns to look at technology in the workplace. Visiting speakers contribute to the personal and social education course on drug awareness, health, road safety, sex education and voluntary work in the community. A counsellor works in the college and there are good links with the Families in Crisis group. The local police hold regular liaison meetings with the college. Classes for members of the community in basic literacy and numeracy and a variety of sports activities take place in the evenings. Languages taught on site outside the formal college day include Bengali, Hindi, Gujarati, Punjabi and Urdu. This is an area which has considerable potential for meeting the wider needs of the community for life-long learning provision.

48. The college works closely with its partner primary schools. Primary pupils from

Years 5 and 6 visit the college and experience 'taster' lessons. Pupils from all the primary schools use the college's ICT facilities and physical education teachers run lunchtime sports clubs in a local primary school. Five members of staff from a range of subject areas have a special responsibility to liaise with primary schools and to plan for curriculum progression and continuity. A number of key staff visit the primary schools to meet the pupils and to gather assessment and curriculum information. This helps them to support students effectively when they begin Year 7.

49. The provision for students with special educational needs is satisfactory. The students' individual education plans are well organised and are available to all teachers. The special needs of students with statements are generally well met by additional teaching from support teachers and learning support assistants in co-operation with the class teachers. However, support was barely adequate during the week of the inspection owing to the absence of key staff and unfilled posts, and this was clearly affecting students' progress adversely in geography and science.

50. The college makes good overall provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Its clear values and principles stress the value of both the individual and the community and are embedded in the day-to-day life of the school.

51. The college does not meet its obligation to provide acts of collective worship in accordance with the determination granted to it by the Local Education Authority and, for that reason, the provision for spiritual development is unsatisfactory. However, religious education lessons provide good opportunities for students to consider the uniqueness of the individual and to develop their own system of beliefs and values through the consideration of a broad range of faiths and cultures. There are also good opportunities to reflect on spiritual matters in other lessons, for example, in English, drama, music and mathematics.

52. The provision for students' moral development is excellent. The difference between right and wrong and the importance of consideration for other people are expressed clearly in the college's single rule, in assemblies and through the consistent expectations of staff. The college places great emphasis on care of its students and the programme of personal, social and health education is well planned. Religious education lessons explore important moral issues and inform students of the moral standpoints of different religious communities.

53. The college makes very good provision for students' social development. The importance of positive and caring relationships is emphasised in personal and social education lessons, assemblies and form-time. Because much of the teaching takes place in these form groups there is opportunity for relationships to be built in the course of work and social events. There are numerous opportunities for students to take part in residential experiences and day visits and the governors have set aside funds to help students in need of financial assistance. In lessons, students develop the skills of collaboration through group work. Initiative and responsibility are developed through college councils and sixth-form students guide younger ones and help organise lunchtime activities. There are close links with the local youth service and students regularly raise funds for local and national charities. Students learn aspects of citizenship through participation in conferences and the local Youth Parliament.

54. The provision for students' cultural development is good overall. Students are involved with their local community in some arts projects. Students learn about different cultures in geography, history, music and religious education lessons, and the festivals of faiths represented in the college are celebrated in assemblies.

HOW WELL DOES THE COLLEGE CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

55. The previous inspection found that the college ensured students' welfare very effectively. This continues to be the case. Teachers know their students well and communication between members of staff is effective. The form tutors, year heads and heads of house work very closely with each other. Their work is very well supported by the work of the senior management team and by an exceptionally conscientious and dedicated education welfare officer.

56. Satisfactory child protection procedures are in place and statutory requirements are met in full. The college's arrangements to ensure students' health and safety are good.

57. The college has a good assessment system which is used effectively to check the students' progress and to provide year heads of year and heads of school with information on individuals and groups. This assessment information is also used in subject curriculum planning, for example, to select the examination syllabuses for the humanities faculty. The assessment data effectively assist staff to set targets for all students.

58. The assessment of students with special educational needs at the time of their entry to Year 7 is satisfactory for identifying their needs and for planning support programmes for them, where necessary. Annual and transitional reviews for students with statements of special needs are properly conducted. All other students who need individual education plans are well monitored through termly reviews. Individual records are used effectively to monitor progress after each lesson.

59. Procedures for monitoring students' personal development are very good. Form tutors work closely with the year heads and heads of house to monitor the students on a day-to-day basis.

60. Procedures to ensure good behaviour are very effective. Members of staff provide very good personal examples and expectations are high. Students know what is and what is not acceptable. Bullying is rare but is dealt with effectively when it occurs.

61. Although the overall level of attendance was well below the national average over the previous year, procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance are excellent. It is difficult to see what more the college could do to improve these procedures. The college recognises that two of its main problems are the high level of unauthorised absence and the fact that a significant number of its students are taken on long-term family visits overseas. Attendance has improved over the last six months, and has responded to the college's vigorous efforts. Parents are regularly reminded of the importance of regular attendance and recent efforts have produced a thirty per cent reduction in the level of term-time holidays. A full-time assistant has also been employed to telephone families on the first day of absence and to process the computerised attendance sheets. Liaison between the college and the education welfare officer ensures that attendance is monitored in great detail. The level of unauthorised absence is still high though it is falling.

HOW WELL DOES THE COLLEGE WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

62. This school places great emphasis on working closely with parents and sees a close

partnership as fundamental in its drive to raise standards. Links with parents are satisfactory overall and most parents support the work of the school, for example, in the supervision of homework. The majority of parents attend consultation evenings and this helps to involve parents in their children's education and plays an important part in encouraging the students to succeed and to achieve well.

63. A newsletter helps to keep parents informed about the day-to-day life of the college. The college translates many of its letters into various community languages. Bilingual members of staff also interpret and this helps to ensure that parents are kept up to date. The school prospectus is attractively presented and contains much useful information, as does the governors' annual report to parents, although the latter does not contain all of the information that it should.

64. The drive to improve attendance means that parents are kept very well informed about their children's attendance and the college follows up each unexplained absence meticulously. When serious concerns arise, home visits are undertaken by the education welfare officer and key members of the teaching staff. Many parents book extended trips abroad during the term, however, which adversely affects the progress of a significant proportion of students although the teachers set work for students during these absences. An increasing proportion of parents have come to understand the harm that this does to their children's education and the number of days lost to term-time holiday has recently fallen by approximately one third.

65. Parents' opinions of the college's work are positive. They are particularly pleased with the standard of teaching, the fact that their children like coming to school and are confident that they are expected to work hard and to do their best. Analysis of the questionnaires returned by parents in advance of the inspection also shows, however, that some parents have misgivings about the amount of homework set and the quality of information provided in students' annual progress reports. Inspectors agree with both of these concerns. Students' reports predominantly focus on their attitudes to work and do not give parents a clear idea of the overall standard achieved. A number of parents feel that the partnership between home and school is insufficiently close but the inspectors consider that the college does what it should to ensure that the partnership is effective.

HOW WELL IS THE COLLEGE LED AND MANAGED?

66. The college is well led and, overall, it is soundly managed. The headteacher and the senior staff provide clear educational direction and have established a good climate for learning. The college is a popular choice amongst parents, locally, and has a deserved reputation as a caring and inclusive school, which provides a good education for its distinctive population of students. The morale of the staff is high and teachers are confident about the quality of their work.

67. The governors support the college and fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Statutory requirements are met except for daily collective worship and some minor matters relating to information in the annual governors' report to parents. Governors are well informed about the school's strengths and weaknesses.

68. The headteacher and senior staff work together closely. The aims of the school are clearly expressed and well understood and the school succeeds in meeting them. The college's development plan provides a good framework for raising standards and improving the quality of education. However, the college needs a strategy to raise standards of the students' numeracy skills in all subjects.

69. The senior staff monitor the college's test and examination performance and attendance by gender and ethnic group. They also monitor teaching and learning through classroom observation. Overall, this ensures that the senior staff and governors are aware of the college's strengths and weaknesses. At present, the main burden for the first-hand monitoring of teaching and learning falls to the heads of the subject faculties. This is now under review.

70. Subject management responsibilities are carried out satisfactorily overall. There are many good features, such as the planning of the subject curriculum, the writing of schemes of work, management of subject finances and resources, induction of new staff and development planning. Art and design, and ICT are particularly well managed. Despite these good features, however, there are inconsistencies across subject faculties in the implementation of some important whole-school policies, as for teaching literacy skills, the setting of homework and marking of written work. The monitoring of teaching and learning by the faculty heads, therefore, needs to be more rigorous to eliminate the inconsistencies.

71. The special educational needs department is well managed and well organised. The subject teachers work closely with the special needs teachers and learning support assistants to meet students' individual needs effectively. The language development team benefits from clear direction, staff are effectively deployed and resources are managed effectively.

72. The college has sufficient teaching staff and class sizes are generally appropriate for the students' needs though there are some unfilled learning support and language team posts. Accommodation is good and the buildings are in good repair. The accommodation is used effectively and provides a suitable environment for learning though some classrooms are small. Facilities for physical education are good. Resources for learning are adequate overall and ICT facilities are very good. However, many musical instruments are in poor condition and this adversely affects standards. The library is small though it is effective in supporting research and learning.

73. The college's income per student is above the national average. The budget was in surplus in the previous financial year and is expected to balance in the current year. Funds allocated for particular purposes are spent appropriately. Though the sixth form is small it is self-sufficient. The delegation of financial powers to the headteacher is appropriate. The governors fulfil their responsibilities for financial management effectively. The principles of best value are consistently applied to ensure that money is well spent. Administration runs smoothly, contributing effectively to the overall efficiency of the school and making effective use of new technology.

74. Overall, the college's improvement is satisfactory since the previous inspection. It is difficult to make a fair comparison of current standards with those prevailing at the time of the previous inspection because the characteristics of the annual intake of pupils to Year 7 have changed significantly since then. As at the time of the previous inspection, the majority of the new Year 7 students have reading ages below their chronological age but test scores of the intake have declined further and are lower than they were then. The examination results fluctuate considerably from one year to another. Though they were lower in 2000 than those at the time of the previous inspection, they were equal to them in 1999. The students in

examination years are currently achieving higher standards than the 2000 results would indicate and the college confidently expects results to improve considerably in 2001, as reflected in the challenging target set by the governors. The college has made a good improvement with the issues presented by the previous inspection. The monitoring and action to improve attendance have improved. Statutory requirements for the curriculum are now met in full. Teaching has improved, though lessons are still not always planned to meet the needs of all students. The teaching of mathematics and the teaching of religious education, in particular, have greatly improved.

75. In view of the good quality of education the school offers, its good leadership, good teaching, the achievement of pupils at GCSE in relation to their low prior attainment, the good ethos of the school and the use it makes of its resources, the school is effective and gives satisfactory value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE COLLEGE DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

76. In order to improve the work of the college and raise standards further, the governors, headteacher and staff should take the following action:

- (1) ensure that the college's strategy for literacy is implemented more consistently in all subjects;
(Paragraphs: 12, 26, 70, 88, 89, 92, 94, 99, 100, 105, 140, 146, 164)
- (2) put in place and implement a whole-school strategy for numeracy in all subjects;
(Paragraphs: 13, 27, 68, 105, 115, 121, 153)
- (3) improve the consistency of the match of work to the full range of attainment in the class, the marking of written work and the setting of homework;
(Paragraphs: 10, 17, 31, 36-39, 70, 74, 80, 92, 105, 107, 124, 146, 153, 167, 185, 187, 192)
- (4) improve the effectiveness of the monitoring of teaching and learning by the subject faculty heads.
(Paragraphs: 69, 70, 94, 114, 127, 181)

In addition to the matters above the governors may wish to consider the following more minor points for inclusion in their action plan:

- improve resources for music; (Paragraphs: 72, 174, 179)
- Improve the students' annual progress reports. (Paragraph: 65)

PROVISION FOR STUDENTS WITH ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE

77. Over two-thirds of the students are from ethnic minority backgrounds, mainly Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi. A total of 704 students, 73 per cent of the roll, have English as an additional language, though this proportion has fallen from 83 per cent of the roll since the previous inspection. The main first languages are Urdu, Gujarati, Bengali and Panjabi. Nearly half of these students are supported through the Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Grant. The majority of the bilingual students are fluent but 53 are at an early stage of learning English. Another 34 students are asylum seekers, having arrived at the school since September, 2000.

78. The college is careful in its analysis of assessment data. Records show that the 2000 results of the college's students for whom English is an additional language were below average in both the national tests of 14-year-olds and the GCSE examinations. In relation to the students' starting points at the beginning of Year 7, they make good overall progress.

79. The deployment of the team of specialist teachers and translators is effective. The support given by them focuses appropriately on the core subjects of English, mathematics and science and the college's development priorities of ICT, and art and design. All students in need of support have intensive English tuition, which may lead to International GCSE at age 16. The deployment of staff draws appropriately on their strengths. Students new to English are introduced to the language in the language development centre. Some of these students are traumatised by recent experience and some are concerned about possible deportation. The college gives them a sense of security and the potential to develop academic and social confidence within the language base. Reading and writing are taught intensively. Further enrichment, including a focus on examination technique, is provided for GCSE students after school in science, geography and mathematics. There is no special emphasis on spiritual development for these students. Moral principles are referred to and the students' own cultural experience is exploited sensitively as a focus for teaching and learning. Newly arrived students are assessed thoroughly and bilingual learners with suspected learning difficulties are referred to with the Educational Psychology Service.

80. The teaching is good and has improved since the previous inspection. Teachers have a competent knowledge of the structure of the English language and expertise in analysing the learning demands of the different subjects. All language development team staff are competent to teach basic skills well and employ suitable methods to enable students to learn effectively. The work of the translators is much appreciated by subject staff. Some intensive English teaching is less effective when the choice of lesson material is not appropriate to the age or experience of the students concerned. Assessment is generally constructive, often with immediate feedback to students. Students rapidly acquire new knowledge and skills in English and make progress in other subjects. Although students are keen to co-operate with one another, there is not enough planned collaborative paired or group work.

81. Attitudes towards learning are very positive in both mainstream and language development centre classes. Students are proud of their work and the older ones understand their targets for GCSE in a range of subjects and know how they can achieve them.

82. The language development team is well managed. The head of the team provides clear direction. The students know what they are doing and this provides security and helps develop their confidence. The inclusive aims of the school are reflected in the dedication and commitment of the team and are successfully achieved. The special grant is used appropriately for ethnic minority students. Teaching is monitored effectively. The teachers' subject qualifications do not fully match the demands of language development across the whole curriculum and there are unfilled vacancies for two teachers and one translator. This staffing restricts training opportunities for mainstream subject staff and some vital work in Bengali. Induction for new college staff is effective and well received.

83. Very good use is made of computer facilities. The accommodation is good and the college has a wide range of resources to support listening, speaking, reading and writing both for access to the curriculum and intensive English.

84. Links with bilingual parents are good and result in high rates of attendance at parents' meetings and offers from parents of work experience placements using home languages for GCSE students.

85. The team looks after the students well and very effectively ensures their safety, care and protection. Some students, deeply traumatised, are helped into normal relationships through the sensitive handling of the team. Sixth-form students return to the language development team base for careers advice and academic support. Attendance is improving, with the involvement of translators in direct contact with parents. The team keeps the students' academic progress under close scrutiny.

PART C: COLLEGE DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	159
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	48

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1	13	45	38	3	0	0

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

Information about the college's students

Students on the college's roll	Y7– Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the college's roll	864	91
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	443	0

Special educational needs	Y7– Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	18	0
Number of students on the college's special educational needs register	282	7

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	657

Pupil mobility in the last college year	No of students
Students who joined the college other than at the usual time of first admission	69
Students who left the college other than at the usual time of leaving	59

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
College data	11.6
National comparative data	5.9

Unauthorised absence	%
College data	3.1
National comparative data	0.4

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	78	88	166

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	7	37	18
	Girls	28	48	36
	Total	35	85	54
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	College	21 (40)	51 (38)	33 (24)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	College	1 (14)	26 (20)	7 (6)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	21	37	11
	Girls	40	53	24
	Total	61	90	35
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	College	37 (39)	55 (51)	21 (31)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	College	12 (18)	28 (23)	4 (7)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	73	53	126

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	11	54	67
	Girls	19	46	47
	Total	30	100	114
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	College	25 (35)	79 (90)	90 (100)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	College	28 (32)
	National	38.4 (38)

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

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	11	18	29

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
College	8.9	8.1	8.4 (12.3)	2.0	-	2.0 (2.9)
National	17.7	18.6	18.2 (17.6)	2.6	-	2.7 (2.8)

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

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	26
Black – African heritage	22
Black – other	1
Indian	171
Pakistani	161
Bangladeshi	139
Chinese	2
White	307
Any other minority ethnic group	35

Exclusions in the last college year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	3	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	3	0
Indian	5	0
Pakistani	33	1
Bangladeshi	6	0
Chinese	0	0
White	57	6
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	68
Number of students per qualified teacher	14.2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	17
Total aggregate hours worked per week	487

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	72
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25
Key Stage 4	24

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	2 560 758
Total expenditure	2 568 374
Expenditure per pupil	2 943
Balance brought forward from previous year	20 822
Balance carried forward to next year	13 206

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	955
Number of questionnaires returned	329

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes college.	43	43	8	4	2
My child is making good progress in college.	39	51	5	1	4
Behaviour in the college is good.	44	40	8	3	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	38	44	11	5	2
The teaching is good.	41	45	6	1	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	40	38	14	4	4
I would feel comfortable about approaching the college with questions or a problem.	42	41	6	3	8
The college expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	60	29	5	1	5
The college works closely with parents.	34	40	13	6	7
The college is well led and managed.	45	36	6	2	11
The college is helping my child become mature and responsible.	41	41	9	3	6
The college provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	48	30	8	4	10

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

ENGLISH

86. In 2000, results in National Curriculum tests for Year 9 pupils were very low and well below the average for similar schools. The results were lower than in mathematics and science. These results show a sharp fall compared with those of previous years and with those of similar schools. The GCSE results in 2000, in both English and English Literature, were well below the national average but in line with results in similar schools. Pupils did as well in English as in most of their other subjects. In previous years, results have been similar. Girls outperform boys by a similar margin to the national picture in the national tests and at GCSE in 2000. In the sixth form, four students took the A-level examination and all passed, although none gained the higher A or B grades.

87. The standard of work of the current Year 9 students is higher than the recent test results would suggest though it is still well below average. Teachers assess the students' work accurately and their assessments of the previous Year 9 (now Year 10) indicate that the students should have achieved better test results than they did. The Year 9 students are achieving satisfactory standards in relation to their very low attainment at the beginning of Year 7, when most had reading ages well below their chronological age.

88. The Year 9 students' speaking and listening skills are satisfactory and better than their reading and writing skills. Middle and lower attaining students listen carefully but give mainly short answers to teachers' questions. Higher attainers answer at greater length and use standard English confidently and fluently. Reading and writing skills are well below average. Students could benefit from more opportunities to read aloud in class; for example, the teachers' simplified versions of the play enabled students to understand the plot of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Though higher attainers accurately read the original version of the play they gave little thought to expression and did not, for example, try to portray the characters of the witches in the opening scene. Even when guided by the teacher, many students find it difficult to explain how the portrayal of the witches reflected people's beliefs in witches in Shakespeare's time. Nearly all students take a pride in the presentation of their written work. Some higher attaining students write well-structured essays, for example, about fox-hunting. Low attaining students and those with special educational needs make good progress when they re-draft their writing with help from the teacher. However, many students still have difficulty with sentence construction, basic punctuation and spelling.

89. In Year 11, standards of work seen are below average for 15 to 16 year olds, but better than recent GCSE results suggest, and most students achieve well in comparison with their attainment at the end of Year 9. Many students lack sufficient confidence to contribute regularly to class discussions and only give short answers to teachers' questions. However, they are much better when discussing in small groups, listening well and responding sensibly to each other's views. Most students read their set texts with good understanding of the plot and characters. Many can explain the significance of events, with help from the teacher. When studying *To Kill a Mockingbird*, they explained why Scout thought that Atticus was not a perfect father by reference to the text that the teacher had identified. Middle and lower attaining pupils analyse the presentation of newspapers, brochures or leaflets quite well but have difficulty in critical discussion of the style of writing. For example, they identify devices, such as alliteration, but make no attempt to explain their effect. A few high attainers write confidently in a range of styles; they write imaginative

stories in which they build up tension to keep their readers in suspense. A significant number of lower attaining students still have severe problems with spelling.

90. Year 13 students' standards of work are satisfactory and close to average. This is not immediately obvious in lessons as some students are shy and lack confidence in discussion. However, their writing shows a secure understanding of the themes, characters and historical background of difficult texts, such as Brian Friel's *Translations*.

91. Students have positive attitudes to their work and behave well. Relationships with teachers and among students are very good. Students from different ethnic backgrounds mix well and work well together in class.

92. Teaching is good overall and there were no unsatisfactory lessons. It is satisfactory in Years 7, 8 and 9 and good in Years 10, 11 and in the sixth form. Teachers manage classes very well, ensuring that students concentrate and listen carefully during class discussions. They have a very secure knowledge of the texts that students are studying and this allows them to ask good, incisive questions that enable pupils to develop their understanding, especially at GCSE and A-level. Teachers plan their lessons carefully, outlining what pupils will be doing at the beginning of the lesson and reviewing what they have done at the end. However, in some lessons, they concentrate too much on the content instead of the objectives. As a result, students are not always sure about what they are expected to achieve. All teachers mark students' work regularly but the standard of marking varies. At its best it provides very good support and advice for students but some teachers only comment on the effort students make. As a result, some students do not know how they should improve the standard of their work. In Years 7, 8 and 9, in particular, teachers do not insist on correction of spelling mistakes and this slows down their progress in basic literacy. Otherwise, teachers are aware of the needs of students with English as an additional language and special educational needs. They provide them with extra advice and support and this helps them to make good progress in lessons. However, teachers do not always challenge higher attaining students as much as they could. In some Year 8 lessons, for example, teachers asked all students the same simple questions about the plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. More able students and those who had studied the play in primary school were not challenged to show their understanding of themes or characters in the play.

93. Since the last inspection, the English faculty has maintained the good quality of teaching that helps students to make good progress by Year 11. Links with the learning support department and drama teachers have improved. For instance, teachers are now more aware of students' individual education plans, especially for students with behaviour difficulties. They take these into account in their lesson plans. The drama department now shares the teaching of the Year 9 Shakespeare play, which increases students' understanding of the text through performance.

94. The management of the faculty has a clear vision for the further development of the subject and teachers are committed to the raising of standards. However, the monitoring of teaching is insufficiently rigorous and does not identify a clear focus for improvement. Some suitable priorities for development have been identified, amongst which is the need to improve assessment procedures, especially in Year 9, so that students are more aware of what they need to do to reach the higher levels. Since the last inspection, the teaching time for English has been reduced for Years 7, 8 and 9. Schemes of work no longer include time for independent reading or use of the library. As a result, few younger pupils read widely and their reading skills do not, therefore, develop as quickly as they could.

Drama

95. All students study drama in Years 7-9 for one lesson each week. In Year 9, standards of performance are below average for 14 year olds. Students work together quite well to devise a variation of the opening witches' scene from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Many speak confidently and clearly when chanting spells with an appropriate rhythm. However, they do not sustain concentration, cannot not stay in role or match their movement to the words of their chants.

96. Drama is a popular GCSE option. Results in the 2000 examination were in line with the national average, as they have been each year since the last inspection. Two classes are studying the subject in the current Year 11 and standards are in line with these results. During the inspection the weaker of the two classes was observed. Some of these students have very good skills of mime, as shown by their convincing portrayal of workers in a biscuit factory. Most can sustain a role well although some are still embarrassed when performing. Higher attaining students presented a convincing improvisation of a family requesting a change of council house because of the death of their father. Others were unaccustomed to the device of forum theatre and several lacked sufficient confidence to suggest improvements to the improvisation.

97. The teaching is good. Drama teachers manage classes very well and give clear instructions that keep students working at a good pace to improve their skills. They plan lessons well, with a good progression of activities that link together effectively. Teachers have high expectations of students and insist on their evaluation of their own performance at the end of each lesson, which helps them to understand what they do well and identifies how they can improve further.

98. The recently appointed head of drama has a clear vision for the future development of drama. Teachers have a firm commitment to raising standards and good progress has already been made with the development of schemes of work. Close links are being developed with the humanities and English faculties to reinforce work that students do in these subjects.

Key skills - literacy

99. Standards of literacy on entry to Year 7 are very low. Although literacy improves as students progress through the college, it still has a negative impact on standards in several subjects. In mathematics, for example, many students are unable to express mathematical ideas precisely in discussions or in writing. Weak spelling and grammar seen in geography and history pull down overall standards and some students have difficulty writing correctly in sentences in science. Some students' reading skills are just sufficient for them to understand texts in most subjects, especially as teachers are usually aware of students' needs and often explain difficult words.

100. The college has a clearly declared strategy for teaching literacy and each subject and faculty has its own policy. However, there is a lack of consistency in the development of literacy skills in different subjects. Some departments, such as geography, music, history, and art and design, include literacy development in their schemes of work, but others do not. The design and technology faculty has begun to monitor the way in which it teaches literacy skills. The teaching of key vocabulary is the most effective practice in most subjects, but this is not enough, however, and teachers seldom take the opportunity to help students develop their reading.

101. Students for whom English is an additional language and those with special educational needs make good progress when taught in small groups as part of an intensive programme to develop their English and literacy skills.

MATHEMATICS

102. The mathematical attainment of the annual intake of students to Year 7 is well below the national average. The results of national tests taken by 14-year-old students in 2000 were well below the national average, but they were above the average of those of similar schools. The rate at which the results are improving is above the national trend. Standards of work are below average by Year 9, though they are satisfactory in relation to the students' well below average starting points in Year 7.

103. Standards of work of the present Year 11 students are below average overall though the students' achievement is satisfactory in relation to their starting points at the outset of their GCSE course in Year 10. In 2000, the GCSE results were well below the national average. However, a greater proportion of students are now entered for the GCSE examination than was the case at the time of the previous inspection. At that time, boys' results were significantly better than those of the girls. This is no longer the case.

104. A-level results in 2000 were well below the national average and a number of students failed to pass the examination. However, the standards of work of the present Year 13 students are better than the examination performance of the previous year, though they are still below average. Although below average, standards represent a satisfactory achievement in relation to the students' GCSE grades. The Year 13 students' work is currently of a sufficiently high standard to pass the A-level examination and some students are producing work of the very highest standard. The college makes good provision for the small number of sixth form students wishing to take Further Mathematics A-level. Very good support is given to students seeking to apply to read mathematics at degree level through developed links with a range of universities.

105. Students who speak English as an additional language make satisfactory progress in mathematics at all stages. Students with special educational needs make good progress when they are well supported, though this support is often lacking. In particular, literacy and numerical skills are not tackled sufficiently for these students to make satisfactory progress in all lessons. The work set is sometimes too difficult for these students. In Years 10 and 11, students with special educational needs make better progress because the work is more closely aligned to their needs.

106. Students generally have good attitudes toward the subject and behave well. All teachers of mathematics foster an atmosphere in which the students can enjoy the subject. They do this by valuing all responses, praising readily and using incorrect answers to demonstrate common errors. Students respond positively to this approach. They have confidence to make suggestions so developing the important skill of being able to formulate hypotheses. Behaviour in lessons is good. Students are keen to learn, on occasions wishing to go beyond the work set. An example is when a Year 11 student asked his teacher why a pendulum was an example of inverse proportionality. Teachers also offer a wide range of structured support to students through extra-curricular activities, which include additional classes for students approaching examinations and introductory workshops at universities. An impressive range of structured revision materials helps students prepare for examination.

107. Teaching is satisfactory overall. It is satisfactory in Years 7-11 but it is good in the sixth form. The teaching is good in about a quarter of all lessons. There has been an improvement in the quality of teaching since the last inspection because students are now given sufficient opportunity to develop and apply their skills. Good teaching skilfully involves all students in class discussion and seeks every opportunity to relate mathematics to the everyday experiences of students. Learning is also increased when teachers call upon students to lead class discussion. This boosts students' confidence in their own mathematical skills and understanding. In the weaker lessons, teachers do not take sufficient account of what students can or cannot do when planning work. Consequently, some students are set tasks that are too demanding and so do not learn what they should, and higher attaining students are not always sufficiently challenged.

108. Sixth-form students enjoy teaching that is always good and sometimes very good. As a consequence, their learning is good. They are dedicated young mathematicians, even those who find some difficulty with the subject at advanced level and all display a very positive attitude to their work.

109. Students respond well to homework and it allows them to practise skills independently, and to gain in confidence. Homework is set in every lesson to all classes.

110. Marking of written work is effective. The comments teachers write in exercise books help students to improve the standard of their work and inform them of their progress. However, the annual reports to parents, whilst correctly evaluating effort and attitudes, often do not adequately indicate students' progress.

111. Teachers assess students regularly and accurately. This is an improvement from the position at the previous inspection when there were marked discrepancies between teacher assessments and the results students achieved in national tests taken at the end of year 9. This is no longer the case.

112. Computers are used to good effect in mathematics lessons and, for example, help students to revise factorisation in algebra. However, wider exploitation of students' good ICT could raise levels of achievement further.

113. Though all mathematics rooms feature prominent displays of key subject vocabulary, insufficient emphasis is placed upon developing students' speaking and listening skills, particularly when dealing with abstract mathematical concepts. Some written material is too difficult for some students to read and comprehend.

114. The management of the faculty is satisfactory overall. Regular staff meetings reinforce subject teamwork and provide a valuable forum for discussing classroom practice and individual students. However, more systematic monitoring and improvement of teaching and learning are essential for the further raising of standards.

Key skills - numeracy

115. Many students entering the college have very low levels of numeracy. These deficiencies are tackled well in mathematics lessons so that students have the necessary numerical skills demanded of other subjects. However, the college has not, as yet, adopted a policy for developing numeracy in other subjects, such as science and geography. In consequence, the contributions other subjects make to the students' numerical development are inadequate.

SCIENCE

116. In 2000, the results of the national tests taken by Year 9 students were well below the national average, both for all schools and for similar schools. The girls outperform the boys in these tests in a similar way to that found nationally. The test results, though low, have risen over the last three years in a similar way to the national trend. The results were lower than those in mathematics but better than in English.

117. Students begin Year 7 with attainment well below the national average. However, they make satisfactory progress throughout Years 7, 8 and 9 and are achieving satisfactory standards in relation to their well below average starting point at the beginning of Year 7. By Year 9, however, standards of work are still well below average and are consistent with the results of the national tests. Students understand the concept of 'fair test' and can plan and record observations in a scientific investigation.

118. GCSE results improved considerably in 1999 but fell back in 2000. The results in 2000 were below the national average for all schools but well above the national average for similar schools. Girls performed better than boys compared with their respective national averages.

119. Students make satisfactory progress in Years 10 and 11 in their knowledge and understanding of science and in their skills. By Year 11, students' standards of work are still well below average. However, their experimental and investigative skills are satisfactory overall, though lower attaining students are weak in this important aspect of the subject. Average attaining students have sound planning skills but are not sufficiently accurate in collecting their experimental results and their analysis and evaluation skills are under-developed. Carefully structured teaching enables all students to develop their understanding of scientific concepts. Though they can recall their knowledge, their ability to apply it in new situations is weak.

120. A-level results in biology, chemistry and physics were below average in 2000 and too many students failed their examinations. Standards of work of the current Year 13 are broadly average; the students are achieving well and have a good grasp of the relevant scientific knowledge. They are encouraged to read widely in the science subjects, which supports their understanding.

121. The students' literacy skills are weak; however, the development of the correct use and spelling of scientific terminology is satisfactory. Numeracy skills are also weak, particularly graphical skills and the ability to read scales, and mathematical knowledge is not applied and practised enough. Students use computers to research information but do not have sufficient practice in using computers for modelling and to collect measurements.

122. Students with special educational needs make sound progress when they have specialist in-class support. At other times, they do not make as much progress as they should. Students with English as an additional language are well supported in lessons and progress at the same rate as the other students.

123. The teaching is good overall. It is satisfactory in Years 7-9 and good in Years 10,11 and the sixth form. No unsatisfactory lessons were seen. A strength of the teaching is the very good relationships between the teachers and the students which engender very positive attitudes and interest in science. Teachers manage their classes very well and insist

on high standards of behaviour. Good subject knowledge and understanding is evident even when teachers are not teaching their own science specialism.

124. The students make better progress when working individually or in small groups when the teacher spends more time talking to individuals. The teachers' expectations are generally appropriately high but in some lessons, especially in Years 7-9, teachers do not match resources and activities well enough to meet the learning needs of the higher attaining students. When this is done well, as in a Year 10 lesson on the cracking of hydrocarbons, worksheets differ according to the students' attainment levels. As a result, the students are well motivated, concentrate on their work and make good progress. In some lessons, however, tasks are the same for students of all attainment levels so that they are not all challenged sufficiently and, in consequence, make less progress. More problem-solving exercises and the application of knowledge to new situations would provide more of a challenge for the higher attaining students. Sometimes, the lesson objectives are not made clear to the students and sometimes there is no review of what they have learned at the end. In some good lessons, different objectives for different groups of students give a clear focus to the learning. In some lessons, teachers set deadlines for tasks, and these motivate students to work productively, but some lessons lack pace when these deadlines are not set. Written work is regularly marked but comments do not show the students how to improve their work.

125. Overall, the teaching motivates and captures the students' interest. The students enjoy science and collaborate well with one another in practical work. They generally behave well, have good listening skills, sustain concentration and come to lessons prepared to work. However, some students lack confidence in their own ability and do not readily volunteer answers to questions posed by the teacher which has a negative effect on their progress.

126. The subject has made a satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection. Teaching and learning have recently improved and this has shown in the results of tests and examinations which, though low, have improved. The department has the capacity to improve further, because of thoughtful and supportive leadership, together with a very positive team spirit and commitment to raising achievement by an extremely dedicated and hard working staff. A range of strategies for raising standards has already been put in place. Procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are good, as is the use of assessment to inform curriculum planning. Assessment is used well to monitor and support academic progress at GCSE but this needs to be developed further in the lower school. Students generally have a good understanding of their own progress. Resources are adequate and are well organised. All lessons are taught in laboratories but these are badly in need of refurbishment.

127. The faculty management's monitoring of teaching is not sufficiently rigorous to improve it and raise standards.

ART AND DESIGN

128. The results of the GCSE examinations were in line with the national the average in 2000 and have been consistently so since the previous inspection. Both boys and girls perform better in this subject than in most others. Girls' do better than boys, however, and their results are well above the national average. The A-level results are above average for grades A-E, but the percentage of achieving higher grades fluctuates from year to year.

129. Standards reached by the current Year 9 students are average overall. Most students are confident in art and design activities and show a sound understanding of visual expression. Whilst working on a project on windows and doors, students' work revealed a

sound understanding of the elements of design, and competent technical skills, when simplifying a complex drawing in order to produce a template for a stencil. Analytical and observational skills are, however, less well developed and this is reflected in the standard of drawing in research and final pieces of work. The achievement of most students is good and all students, including those with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language, make good progress. Students begin Year 7 with standards of work well below the national average and by Year 9, most have caught up. They learn quickly because the quality of teaching is good. Over time, the course gives pupils a sound understanding of formal elements and introduces them to a range of techniques. In a project on people and places, students made rapid gains in their understanding of how to portray movement in a figure, by using a series of related shapes after studying the work of Duchamp. Students with special educational needs make good progress when lessons are linked directly to homework and they build on basic skills in structured steps to give them clear direction.

130. In the GCSE course, standards are average by Year 11. At this level, they interpret whole-class themes; they explore, interpret and analyse when researching areas such as Pop Art. The higher attainers used the work of Lichtenstein effectively to extend work into computerised digital imagery. The students are achieving very well; they are encouraged to take a more active part in learning and study past and contemporary art whilst developing their own style. Students make greater progress when they can learn independently.

131. In Year 13, A-level students are achieving well and are reaching average standards, which is reflected in the recent examination results. They work with a sound degree of individuality and show in-depth analysis and exploration of ideas and styles. Students can discuss their work and intentions articulately, and in a project on portraiture their research was thorough and of good quality. However, the final pieces of work of some students are insufficiently developed in this respect. The students make very good progress and their work shows a growing depth of understanding of concepts and of the handling of a wide range of media over the span of the two-year course. Students quickly take on the increased demand for individuality. Although a significant proportion of the students start the course with no formal art and design qualification, their folders reflect a steep learning curve, showing rapid gains in knowledge and understanding.

132. The overall quality of teaching is very good. It is good in Years 7-9 and very good in Years 10-11 and in the sixth form. Projects are well planned, using interesting resources and include a range of enjoyable and challenging activities. In the very best lessons, teachers give very clear explanations, demonstrate effectively and build-in an element of humour to maintain the students' interest. The teachers manage students very well and their high expectations of behaviour create a positive attitude in pupils who want to do their best.

133. Most students are lively and their enthusiasm and energy are channelled constructively into learning. In discussion, teachers diversify on points that appeal to students and encourage them to build on personal aspects, which motivate and interest them, which results in an imaginative, individual response. Lower attaining students are given the support and encouragement to respond confidently in discussion. Specialised vocabulary is built into projects and displayed in the art and design rooms and its use is positively encouraged to promote literacy skills. Homework arising from projects is set regularly and is used effectively to consolidate analytical skills but it is not used sufficiently for structured research or to develop students' independent learning skills. Teachers have a very good command of their subject, which is evident in the frequent reference to artists and cultural influences and this strongly supports learning. The high quality of individual advice plays an important role on raising standards and gives clear direction to students on how to develop work to a high level.

134. Students respond well to the effective teaching and this contributes significantly to the

progress and achievement in all years. The relationship between teachers and students is good, enabling teachers to raise the self-esteem of students. There is a very good working atmosphere in classes; for example, students in a Year 10 lesson worked in near silence whilst engrossed in their tasks. Many attend the art and design club and pursue work in their own time. Sketchbooks in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form strongly support learning but their use in Years 7-9 is less consistent.

135. The faculty is well led and managed and has continued to maintain the high standards reported in the last inspection. The head of department provides strong leadership with a clear vision of the departments' aims and the teachers have a shared commitment to raising standards. Since the last inspection, long term planning has been revised and effective systems are now in place. Schemes of work within the department ensure clear progression through the school. In the first term of Year 7, all students follow a general introductory module; however, students would make better progress in analytical and observational skills if the module were art-specific. The department's use of computers is very good and is well planned, and students make good use of them for creative and research purposes. The subject has its own intra-net site of resources. The curriculum is broad, balanced and enriched by visits to art galleries in Britain and abroad. Exhibitions of students' work are held each year, in the school and the local art gallery. The quality of display in classrooms and areas of the school strongly contributes to the ethos of the subject.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

136. In recent years, the overall GCSE results in design and technology subjects have been below the national average. In 2000, the GCSE results in graphics products were in line with the national average. The girls' results in 2000 were significantly above the average for girls in graphics and in food technology. Girls outperform boys, whose results are well below the national average. The overall proportion of students achieving a grade in the range A*-G is slightly above average. A-level results in design technology were above the national average. A very small number of students took A-level in graphics. No sixth-form students are currently taking courses in design and technology subjects.

137. Standards of work of the current Year 9 are below average but represent satisfactory achievement for these students. Students make satisfactory progress, including those with special educational needs and the great many with English as an additional language. The higher attainers, mostly girls, achieve well and reach average standards by Year 9. Most students have a satisfactory understanding of the design process and principles. Graphical communication skills are satisfactory overall. Girls tend to take greater care and take more pride in their work than boys and are more conscientious in their research and design work. Literacy skills are weak overall, especially in the work of the average and lower attaining students who are unsure of the correct terminology when explaining and describing their ideas. In practical lessons in food technology, Year 7 students' are developing their skills of using kitchen tools and utensils well, for example, in the preparation of salads. Similarly, Year 7 students are developing skills of joining different resistant materials well. On occasions, students reveal flair and imagination in work, for example, when Year 9 students were involved with designing and making portable weighing scales. However, students' knowledge and understanding of mechanisms, pneumatics and their skills in the use of computer-aided manufacture are relatively weak. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress, especially when supported by specialist staff.

138. By Year 11, standards of work are below average overall. In all design and technology subjects students make good progress and are achieving well in relation to their starting points at the start of the GCSE course. Students achieve well in graphics products where the work in their design folios is well above average. Finished products show creativity, especially

the work of the higher attainers. The design process is well understood and firmly embedded in all projects. Graphical communication skills are good, especially so in the work of the higher attaining girls.

139. Literacy skills are better than in Year 9 although weaknesses remain in the work of average and lower attaining students, and many do not use the correct subject terminology. More use could be made of computers in GCSE coursework, especially at the design stage.

140. The teaching is good. The students improve and develop their design and realisation skills consistently throughout the school. Teachers provide students with clear guidelines for their design tasks although some worksheets are not adapted to cater for the full range of attainment in the class. The school's strategy for developing students' literacy skills is not consistently implemented. There are also missed opportunities to apply and extend numeracy skills. However, the good teaching ensures that students are motivated and that they know what is expected of them in their design projects. As a result, they make good progress in the great majority of lessons. The great majority of students respond well to the teaching and behave well in lessons. The assessment system is used effectively to support students' progress towards their targets. However, students are not always sure of the standards they have reached in Years 7 to 9. Homework is regularly set and recorded in students' planners and it effectively extends the students' knowledge and understanding of the subject. Some classes are unusually large for practical subjects but the teachers ensure safe working practices. Technical support is barely sufficient, especially in food and textiles.

141. Good leadership provides clear educational direction for the subject. The curricula are well planned. The faculty head monitors teaching and learning effectively. Since the previous inspection, standards have been maintained.

GEOGRAPHY

142. When students join the college in Year 7, their attainment is well below average and, although they make satisfactory progress in lessons, it is not enough for them to catch up, so that the standards of work of Year 9 students are still below average. This is also reflected in the results of teachers' assessments, which are below average. In general, students learn at an appropriate pace in Years 7–9 so that their achievement is satisfactory overall but there is some underachievement when the few higher attaining students are not moved on quickly enough to more challenging tasks. Students generally make satisfactory progress in their knowledge of places, ranging from studies of the local area in Year 7 to a study of Japan in Year 9. Students are introduced to and use an appropriate subject vocabulary, helped by the displays of key words and the use of glossaries for units of work. Most use graphs effectively, for example to compare types of employment in two regions of Japan. Higher achieving students go on to offer some explanations for the contrasts, but the majority write short descriptive answers. Lower achieving students' understanding of the subject is weak and they have difficulty in explaining what they have learned, both in class and in their written work. Enquiry skills are introduced in Year 7 but generally students rely heavily on their teachers and there are too few opportunities for students to work with independence and initiative. Very occasionally the teacher's control of behaviour is ineffective which results in time spent establishing order rather than on learning.

143. Until recently, the humanities faculty entered students for a GCSE humanities examination. This has changed. The first entries for single subject geography GCSE were in 2000, when results were very low in relation to the national average. An over-estimation of some students' abilities to cope with the higher tier paper contributed to disappointing results. Standards are now improving and students in Years 10 and 11 make good progress in lessons and are achieving well in relation to their starting points at the beginning of the course

because the teaching is good, though standards of work are still below average by Year 11. Students use a satisfactory range of techniques to collect and present information about the local area, but their ability to analyse and evaluate their findings is weaker. They acquire a sound understanding of man's impact on the environment; for example, they can describe some advantages and disadvantages of the development of tourism in less developed countries. They recognise the need to protect fragile environments and offer thoughtful suggestions about how this could be done. Higher achieving students make good use of information from a range of sources, including Ordnance Survey maps, to make decisions about urban developments. For example, Year 10 students use evidence to select the best site to locate a retail park and identify the conflicts that arise about how land should be used. Lower achieving students have difficulties with retaining knowledge and skills and applying it to new work and this limits their progress over time. For example, many had difficulty in locating the sites proposed for development as they were unable to use grid references, which slowed their progress.

144. No students are taking geography at A-level. Some Year 12 students are taking GNVQ Intermediate Leisure and Tourism, and these students are reaching the standards expected.

145. Students with special educational needs generally make satisfactory progress because they are well supported by structured tasks. With additional support some make good progress, but in some classes more support is needed to meet the wide-ranging needs within the group. Students who speak English as an additional language also make satisfactory progress. In a Year 10 lesson, students made good progress with the help of an additional language teacher who had adapted the resources to promote students' language development to good effect.

146. Overall the teaching is good. The teaching for GCSE is good and in Years 7-9 it is satisfactory. Teachers are enthusiastic and hard working. They have good knowledge of their subject, so that explanations are clear and students are well prepared for examinations. Relationships between teachers and students are good. Teachers are approachable and generous with the time they give to individuals both in lessons and after school in providing help with revision and coursework. Lessons are well planned, with emphasis on improving literacy by the use of key words and useful prompts to encourage written work. However, students' reading and comprehension skills need further development. Non-specialist teachers are well supported by centrally produced booklets, which are modified to meet the needs of higher and lower achieving students. However, occasionally tasks are too easy for higher achieving students and some students with special educational needs require more support if they are to make enough progress. Teachers have high expectations of students' behaviour and efforts and discipline is generally good. Teaching was unsatisfactory in only one lesson when too much time was spent establishing order and this resulted in unsatisfactory progress. Homework is set regularly and generally extends the work done in lessons, but overall amounts are slight. A consistent weakness lies in the marking of students' work, which although regularly checked and commented upon by teachers, is ungraded and does not provide students with a clear idea of how to improve.

147. Students respond well to the work in most geography lessons. Most behave well and make good efforts to complete tasks and to present their work neatly. Relationships in lessons are good and lessons are purposeful. Very occasionally, students are difficult to engage in tasks and the sporadic attendance of a few, mainly in Years 10 and 11, adversely affects their progress.

148. The head of faculty and geography co-ordinator provide good leadership and direction for the subject. Teamwork and relationships are good and teachers new to the college and non-specialist staff are well-supported. This contributes to effective teaching. The curriculum

is enriched by residential fieldwork for some, but the faculty recognises the need to extend opportunities for all students to carry out some fieldwork. The use of the students' good ICT skills is not yet exploited enough in geography.

149. Since the previous inspection, initiatives to raise standards have been identified and implemented and they are beginning to have a positive impact on achievement. Progress has been made in re-writing schemes of work to provide clearer learning objectives and in relating assessments more closely to National Curriculum levels. The quality of teaching has been maintained. The faculty has contributed to the successful introduction of a vocational course in Leisure and Tourism in the sixth form. Although they remain below average, standards are improving, especially in examination classes.

HISTORY

150. The examination results are lower than at the time of the previous inspection. In other respects, the department has improved: schemes of work have been rewritten and the National Curriculum requirements are fully now met. A wider variety of source material is used and tasks more closely match the individual needs of students, with better opportunities for extended written work.

151. The overall standards of work in Year 9 are below average and are in line with the results of the teachers' assessments of Year 9 in 2000. Most students begin Year 7 with poor knowledge and understanding of history, but make satisfactory progress and, by Year 9, they have developed the essential enquiry skills of the subject. Standards, though below average, represent satisfactory achievement.

152. The standards of work of the current Year 11 students are below average but in view of their below average starting points at the beginning of the course, their achievement is satisfactory. The most recent GCSE results were well below the national average. Students gain valuable experience in focusing their work on examination requirements. Some can link cause and effect well, as was shown, for example, in a Year 11 lesson when students considered the different results of appeasement for Chamberlain and Hitler. Their written work, however, indicates weaknesses in knowledge, understanding and retention of facts. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress with tasks well matched to their attainment and need but the support for these students is barely adequate. Students

who have English as an additional language are making good progress. Overall, girls reach higher standards than boys, which is also shown in the GCSE results.

153. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. It enables the students to make steady progress and to achieve satisfactory standards from a low starting point at the beginning of Year 7. Teachers have good subject knowledge and their lessons are well planned so that students understand clearly what they will learn. Teachers' expectations are appropriate and students respond with interest and enthusiasm. Discipline is effective and students work at a satisfactory pace. Learning is consolidated effectively at the end of lessons so that students understand the progress they have made. Students' numeracy skills are not exploited or sufficiently extended in this subject. Students are frequently expected to read aloud in lessons and teachers frequently check students' understanding of historical terms. However, opportunities to promote students' writing and comprehension skills in reading need further development. Homework is set regularly and consolidates the work done in lessons. However, more lengthy tasks would help to extend written work. Students' written work is marked but teachers do not make clear enough to them how to improve.

154. The use of ICT is satisfactory; for example in a Year 8 lesson, three students with problems in handwriting were effectively using a programme to produce work of the expected standard.

155. The subject makes a strong contribution to students' moral education, for example, with regard to slavery and warfare. There are few extra-curricular activities, but more visits to sites of historical interest are planned. After-school revision sessions for Year 11 are popular and helpful to the students.

156. The leadership and management of the subject are good. Documentation is thorough and gives good support for non-specialist teachers. Teaching schemes are securely based on the National Curriculum.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

157. The results of the GCSE short course were well above the national average. Girls' results were higher than those of the boys who achieved average results. Students tend to achieve better GCSE results in this subject than in their other subjects. Results in GNVQ ICT are comparable with the national average.

158. In Year 9, overall standards of work are above average. Students achieve very well and develop good skills in processing and presenting information, for example, using word-processing software. They solve mathematical problems using spreadsheets, for example, to do with weekly pocket money in Year 7, illustrating their findings in the form of line graphs, bar and pie charts. The students develop an elementary understanding of control technology, for example, through designing a simulated system to control an imaginary theme-park water ride. However, little is being done to extend their understanding of control technology through practical applications, for example, in the use of computer-aided manufacturing. Higher attainers use the technical vocabulary of the subject well with lower attainers showing a less secure grasp and use of the appropriate terminology. Some students have well developed skills of presentation incorporating sound and animated images. Students with special educational needs are interested in their work and make good progress especially when supported by specialist staff. The great many students with English as an additional language make good progress.

159. Building on their good foundations at the start of Year 10, the students continue to achieve very well, reaching well above average standards by Year 11. They make good

progress in a variety of contexts and increasingly challenging situations. They choose appropriate styles of graphical representation to present information, and make valid interpretations using word-processing and desktop publishing software and understand the importance of accuracy of data. In many subjects, computers are used well to write and present coursework assignments and for gathering and handling information from a range of sources, including the Internet. However, students good skills are not yet fully exploited in some other subjects, especially design and technology, geography and science.

160. Students following GNVQ Advanced and Intermediate ICT courses are reaching the standards expected. Students' action plans are detailed and thorough and reflect good planning and effective independent learning skills. Word-processing and presentation skills, generally, are good. In Year 12, students are making good progress in programming spreadsheets, for example, to handle business invoices. Students are building very effectively on the firm foundation of knowledge and skills which they acquired in the lower school.

161. Teaching is very good throughout the school. Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their subject and are very successful in presenting it in a way which interests the students. Basic information skills are taught very well. Information communication and handling tasks are very well matched to students' interest and are well-structured enabling students' to build effectively on their prior knowledge and skills. Teachers provide high levels of individual support, challenge and guidance working with students at their computers. The system to assess students' attainment and record progress in ICT is very good in the timetabled lessons although less effective through other subjects. The teaching styles adopted affect very positively the students' learning. As a result, most students sustain their concentration spans for appropriate lengths of time and make good progress. The discipline is also very effective. Technical support is efficient.

162. Since the previous inspection, a very substantial investment has been made in resources. The resources are very good. Standards have risen significantly and this subject is now very effective. The leadership and management of the subject are very good.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French

163. The results of the teachers' assessments of Year 9 students in French in 2000 were well below the national average. The GCSE examination results were also well below the national average. Over the past three years, GCSE results have varied considerably. In 1999, the results were very low but they rose significantly in 2000. Boys' results were lower than those of the girls by a larger margin than is found nationally. Almost every pupil took a modern language, either French or Spanish, to GCSE and the proportion of students achieving grades A*-G was in line with the national average, which indicates that the lower attaining students achieved well. No students took A-level in modern languages in 2000. Currently, only one student is studying French at A-level in another secondary school, through consortium arrangements.

164. Standards of work of the present Year 9 students in French are well below average. Although standards are low, they represent satisfactory achievement in relation to the students' poor literacy skills at the beginning of Year 7. The students make satisfactory progress in their listening and speaking skills but make less progress in their reading, especially of longer passages, and in their writing at length. This is because many of them, especially boys, have poor literacy skills and find reading and writing particularly difficult. Year 9 students can discuss a range of topics such as family life and buying food; the majority use

at least two tenses when listening to tapes, although they are not always able to use them accurately when writing. The higher achieving students do not always do as well as they might because they do not have sufficient experience before the middle of Year 9 of manipulating tenses and writing or reading at length.

165. Standards are still well below average by Year 11, but are satisfactory in relation to standards at the end of Year 9. Students speak in French with reasonable fluency and good pronunciation.

166. Students with special educational needs achieve well because of the support they receive from assistants in class and appropriate teaching. Students with English as an additional language make satisfactory progress. A significant minority of students do not make sufficient progress as they are affected by long term absence.

167. The teaching and learning of French are satisfactory overall. Teachers have good strategies to manage behaviour and know individual students' strengths and weaknesses well, consequently relationships between staff and students are very good. Occasionally students behave less well when they feel that the activity is too easy or too difficult or they do not understand what they have to do. Students do not always complete homework well and they do not consistently record their work carefully in their organisers. Assessment of students' performance is satisfactory; students have regular tests and the results of these are recorded carefully but pupils are still unsure about what they have to do to improve.

Spanish

168. The results of the teachers' assessments in Spanish of students at the end of Year 9 in 2000 were below the national average and the GCSE results were well below the national average. A much greater percentage of students take Spanish than is nationally the case. Although boys' results were lower than those of the girls, the difference was not significantly different from the national picture. Over the past three years, the results have fluctuated but the general trend is upward. No sixth-form students entered for A-level Spanish in 2000.

169. Standards of work in Spanish are higher than those in French, though they are below average by Year 9. Though below average, these standards reached are good in relation to the students' low level of literacy at the start of Year 7. Students make good progress in listening and speaking but only satisfactory progress in reading and writing at length and from memory. This is because many students find reading difficult. Students make slightly better progress in writing than reading because they often receive appropriate help with writing tasks from teachers and learning support assistants. Students can talk about a range of topics, such as their pets, shopping and the world of work.

170. In Year 11, current standards are well below average. Most students can use at least two tenses when listening to tapes although they are not always able to use them accurately when writing without a significant amount of help. The higher achieving students do not always do as well as they might because they are not always encouraged to work from memory and have too little time to learn how to use tenses accurately. Students with special educational needs, however, achieve very well because of the support they receive in class both from teachers and from assistants. Pupils with English as an additional language make

satisfactory progress. Standards are satisfactory overall but a significant minority of students underachieve because of long-term absence.

171. The teaching and learning of Spanish are satisfactory overall but good in Years 7, 8 and 9. The teachers work hard to ensure that students work well and listen carefully to them and to each other. They plan lessons well so that there is a variety of activities and tasks so that students move swiftly from one to another. In the best lessons, the higher attainers work from memory and produce work unaided, as seen in a Year 9 class when students were writing about their holidays. Students enjoy lessons and respond very well when they can use computers; for example, to write a *curriculum vitae* or to check the meaning of words using an electronic dictionary. Teachers have very good strategies to ensure that the work set matches the wide range of attainment in the classes and therefore meets the needs of all the students. This is particularly the case for those with writing difficulties who have support materials and carefully designed worksheets. Assessment of students' performance is satisfactory and is similar to procedures followed in French. Students are given much helpful feedback about their performance during tasks in lessons which enables them to improve.

Both languages

172. The leadership and management of modern languages are satisfactory. All staff are working hard to improve the quality of education further by making more use of computers and by improving reading. Progress since the previous inspection has been satisfactory; teachers are better at meeting the wide needs of the students. Teaching remains satisfactory in French but has improved in Spanish. Behaviour is better and is now good.

MUSIC

173. By the age of 14, standards are below average but represent a satisfactory overall achievement for these students. They compose and perform short pieces on keyboards and other classroom instruments with confidence. A significant number understand the fundamental use of notation to help them work out the pitch of notes, and a few perform convincingly in ensembles. Most students, however, have difficulty keeping rhythmically together and play with limited musical expression. They use elementary terms to describe the music they hear.

174. By the age of 16, the standards reached by students choosing to study music to GCSE are below average. The GCSE results in 2000 were well below the national average. A significant number of students have weak performing skills and they can play only single-line melodies, for example, the theme from the film *Titanic*. However, a few other students synchronise the melody with harmonic and rhythmic keyboard features effectively. Composing skills, however, are about average. The best examples seen were generally of a reasonable length, harmonised and well structured. A few students effectively use computers to compose conventional music. Students' overall achievement is satisfactory but there is some underachievement because performing skills at this stage should be better than they are. In part this is due to poor quality instruments.

175. For many students, the basic skills of composing and performing learnt in lessons are their only contact with practical music making. Extra instrumental lessons, normally provided by visiting specialists, have not been available for some years though plans have been made to re-start them this year. Owing to an unstable period of staff changes and a lack of specialist leadership and management since the previous inspection, suitable provision for teaching higher musical skills has not yet been made.

176. Students are taught enthusiastically and enjoy their work in practical lessons and through an increasing variety of extra-curricular activities. Students with special educational needs are helped to participate fully in all musical activities and make good progress. Those with English as an additional language also make good progress.

177. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall and accounts for the students' satisfactory achievement. The teaching was at least satisfactory in all lessons observed and was good in the majority of them; however, the development of performing skills is a matter that needs more emphasis. Composing tasks are introduced with realistic expectations of what students of different levels of musical skills can achieve. Lessons are well planned and musical objectives are clearly understood by students. Teachers are particularly adept at rehearsing the whole class prior to individual practising. Most students have good attitudes towards practising on their own and collaborating in small groups.

178. Although the behaviour of a few is sometimes less than satisfactory, teachers maintain firm and sympathetic discipline that encourages and controls their enthusiasm. Most students enjoy the creative effort involved in playing instruments and are happy to demonstrate their musical achievements at the end of each lesson. They are well supported by the teachers, who are both experienced musicians. All lessons are productive and students' performances are constantly assessed and recorded. The pace of learning in most lessons is good. In a few, it was restricted, either by a lack of sufficient good quality instruments to keep every student fully occupied, or by attempts to enrich the teaching with too great a variety of musical illustrations.

179. The accommodation for music is good but resources are inadequate. Many instruments are in urgent need of repair or replacement and there are not enough of them for students to practise independently, particularly when two lessons take place at the same time. This adversely affects standards. The pianos are old and of little use for any expressive performance. Recording equipment is inadequate, particularly for GCSE purposes.

180. Over the past few months, a good start has been made to introduce a variety of extra-curricular musical activities. At the time of the inspection, about 50 students participated in these each week. A choir and a keyboard club are growing in popularity. There is, as yet, no tradition of concerts to extend students' social and cultural development.

181. There is no head of music in post. The subject is currently taught by two newly-qualified specialists, after a succession of temporary appointments. The time allocated for GCSE work, a feature criticised in the previous inspection, is now sufficient, and a start has been made to develop a scheme of work that takes account of the new levels of attainment required by the National Curriculum. However, the lack of stability in staffing has delayed the provision of a much-needed long-term plan for development of the subject.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

182. Standards are broadly average. On entry students' prior experience in physical education is widely variable though generally below average, and especially for girls. GCSE results are well below the national average for A*-C grades though the department has so far only entered one group, in 2000. Steps have been taken to raise standards in the current year and indications from work seen are encouraging.

183. By Year 9, standards of work are average. Students make good progress and achieve well overall, though some underachieve because of absence. In gymnastics, most girls produce sequences of movement that are well controlled and show good standards of creativity. Most students achieve well and work hard to improve their skills, with good success in badminton. Students make good progress in their personal fitness and in their knowledge and understanding of the importance of warming-up activities in their lessons.

184. By Year 11, standards of work, including fitness, are average. Girls do not perform as well as boys in mixed activities, however, and are disadvantaged by such arrangements. Students with English as an additional language generally make satisfactory progress though some are held back because of their difficulties with language. In general, students with special educational needs make good progress. Standards of written work show that the current GCSE students are achieving well. Written work reveals pronounced weaknesses in literacy which need to be tackled more vigorously. Progress is better in practical sessions.

185. The quality of teaching is good overall and is never less than satisfactory. All teachers have good subject knowledge and this enables them to devise activities which students can master quickly. As a result, most students respond positively in most lessons. They respond particularly well when teachers set clear objectives which enable students to understand what to do in order to improve. In a minority of lessons, some of the tasks set are not sufficiently well matched to the learners' capabilities. Paired work is not sufficiently well developed in practical lessons and there are missed opportunities for strengthening understanding through evaluating another's work.

186. Relationships both amongst the students and between students and teachers are very good. Behaviour and levels of participation are generally good and discipline is effective. This is a particular strength of the teaching which makes a major contribution to students' success and achievement.

187. The requirements of the National Curriculum are met at both key stages though the work planned does not reflect the cultural background of the students sufficiently well, especially the girls. The programme of extra-curricular activities in sports and games is very good and is a considerable strength. The assessment system however, is barely adequate. The leadership of the department lacks long-term vision and strategic planning and needs to delegate tasks more effectively. Though the department has begun to tackle its weaknesses management is only just satisfactory.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

188. There were no candidates entered for GCSE or A-level examinations in 2000. When students enter the college at the beginning of Year 7 their attainment is broadly average in this subject, unlike in most others.

189. No lessons for students in Years 7-9 were taught during the week of the inspection. However, based on the work seen and on discussions with students, the overall standard of their work by Year 9 is average for their age, in relation to the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus, and represents satisfactory achievement. Students make satisfactory progress in both their knowledge of religion and of their learning from it. They understand what religion is and how believers express their faith through worship. They can correctly explain the significance of some of the major festivals and rituals of Christianity and of other faiths studied. They can name sacred books and some can explain how they differ. They know that for some believers faith influences their customs of dress and food but most do not appreciate the effect that belief has on issues of right and wrong. Some students empathise with the excitement experienced by believers as the result of religious experiences, for

example, the feelings of a Jewish girl at her Bat Mitzvah. Students with special educational needs and those having English as an additional language make satisfactory progress but there is some under-achievement by the highest attaining students.

190. The Year 11 students' are achieving satisfactory standards which are average in relation to the Agreed Syllabus. Students have considered the important questions of suffering, belief and death. They know what the major faiths teach about these matters and discuss the implications for their own developing values. They consider alternative views about moral issues, express and justify their own views and know how the major religions approach them. In discussion, the higher attaining students reveal an ability to express and justify their opinions but their written work is of a lower standard.

191. The sixth-form students receive their religious education through a programme of planned conferences, both in college and in co-operation with other schools. This arrangement meets statutory requirements. No judgement could be made during the inspection of the standards reached.

192. The teaching is satisfactory and makes a good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Although most of the teaching is done by teachers who have no specialist background, lessons are appropriately planned. Discipline is good and lessons are orderly. Students' good behaviour and positive attitude to the subject contribute effectively to their progress and an effective climate for learning encourages students to respect the views and beliefs of others. The aim of each lesson is clearly shared with students which gives a sense of purpose and focuses their attention. All lessons feature a variety of strategies and activities, which sustain the students' interest, though more use could be made of students' own cultural background and first-hand experience of worship. Specialist words associated with the subject are systematically introduced and develop students' ability to use the correct vocabulary. The pace of learning is maintained with smooth transitions between activities and clear instructions enabling students to understand what is required of them. Lesson time is fully used but the setting of homework is inconsistent, especially in Years 10 and 11. Teachers' expectations are generally appropriate although the demands they make of the higher attainers could be greater. In Years 7-9, students with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language are assisted in their learning by the provision of learning materials matched to their needs and therefore make satisfactory progress. However insufficient detail appears in lesson planning about the use of this material. Students' work is regularly marked with encouraging comments however, students would benefit from more comments about the standard of their work and about how it can be further improved. A system to assess and record the standard of students' work and progress is being developed but needs to be more rigorous.

193. The work of the subject benefits from the good leadership and management of the humanities faculty, which supports and systematically monitors standards of teaching and students' work. The subject planning includes longer-term plans for further improving assessment and introducing a GCSE examination. The improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory and standards have risen. The subject now meets statutory requirements. The teaching has improved and the subject now has more teaching time in Years 10 and 11. Staffing is satisfactory though most of the teachers are not religious education specialists.