

## INSPECTION REPORT

### **THE CHALFONTS COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Chalfont St Peter, Gerrards Cross

LEA area: Buckinghamshire

Unique reference number: 110529

Principal : Sue Tanner

Reporting inspector: Roger Holmes  
2632

Dates of inspection: 24<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> March 2003

Inspection number: 249716

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Secondary Modern
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	The Chalfonts Community College Narcot Lane Chalfont St Peter Gerrards Cross Buckinghamshire
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Michael Burnage
Date of previous inspection:	13 <sup>th</sup> January 1997

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
2632	Roger Holmes	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it? The school's results and pupils' achievements How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
14404	Alan Rolfe	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
14871	Beryl Buteux	Team inspector	English	English as an additional language
10782	Henry Moreton	Team inspector	Mathematics	
5985	Mike Holland	Team inspector	Science	
31688	Brian McGonagle	Team inspector	Art and design	
2491	Doug Beaumont	Team inspector	Design and technology	
12470	Brian Greasley	Team inspector	Geography	
8873	Charlotte Evers	Team inspector	History	Education Inclusion
17923	Michael Shaw	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
19026	Brian Downes	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
7315	Geoffrey Kinder	Team inspector	Music	
22042	John Challands	Team inspector	Physical education	
10448	Michael Elson	Team inspector	Religious education	
18447	Ron Cohen	Team inspector	Business education Citizenship	How good are curricular and other opportunities?
4676	Mary Griffiths	Team inspector		Special educational needs How well does the school care for its pupils?

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London WC2B 6SE

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

The Chalfonts Community College is a secondary modern school taking boys and girls between the ages of 11 and 18. With 1684 students on roll it is much bigger than most secondary schools. Of these, 230 are in the sixth form, which is average sized. Students travel from a wide area of South Buckinghamshire to attend the school. It has grown considerably since its last inspection, partly because it now takes students one year earlier and partly because it has started admitting around 300 students each year. The college is popular and there are many more applications for places than it can accommodate.

The great majority of students are white and from United Kingdom backgrounds. Most of the remainder are from Indian or Pakistani heritage families. Only a few have English as an additional language and none are at the early stages of learning it. There are 282 students on the college's register for special educational needs, which is about average for a school of this size, and 28 of these have statements for their special needs, which is lower than average. The college also has a special unit for five students with physical disabilities and hearing impairment.

Students are drawn from the 61 per cent who are not selected for grammar school places in Buckinghamshire on the basis of tests they take at age 11; consequently, there are fewer students from the top of the attainment range than in a fully comprehensive intake.

The college has been successful in achieving a number of awards. It has received Technology College status and the Schools Curriculum Award for the third time, has just been awarded Charter Mark status as well as the School Achievement Award for its improving examination results. It is working towards becoming a Training School.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

The Chalfonts Community College is a very good school with some excellent features. The outstanding leadership of the principal, strongly supported by the leadership team, has established an extremely positive ethos in the school in which everyone's achievement is valued. Teachers are highly committed and students grow in self-confidence and maturity. As a result students make very good progress and achieve much better results than in other schools of this type.

#### **What the school does well**

- Students make very good progress and achieve good results.
- They have positive attitudes to learning.
- Behaviour is very good.
- Leadership is excellent.
- Teachers and other staff are very committed.
- Very effective support systems help the students develop very well.
- Financial management is excellent.

### What could be improved

- Some teachers do not mark students' work well enough.
- A very small proportion of teaching is not effective enough.

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

## HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The college has made very good progress since it was last inspected in January 1997, particularly over the last three years. All of the key issues identified in the last report have been addressed successfully. In addition to these, the quality of teaching has improved considerably and a much more purposeful atmosphere has been established. The standard of accommodation has also been improved greatly. As a result of all this, standards have risen considerably and the college has grown in popularity.

## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by students at the end of Year 9, Year 11 and the sixth form, based on their average point scores in assessments, GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
Year 9	D	C	C	A
GCSE examinations	D	C	C	A
A-levels/AS-levels	D	D	*	

**Key**

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

\* National comparisons for 2002 are not yet available.

Students do much better than would be expected from their results when they first join the school. As a secondary modern school, the college takes its students from the 61 per cent who are not selected for grammar schools in Buckinghamshire. They make better progress than in most schools during Years 7, 8 and 9, and by the time they are in Year 9, test results are up to the national average and much better than in other secondary modern schools. The best results are in mathematics, which are above the national average and much better than other secondary modern schools. Results in English are above and in science they are in line with other secondary modern schools. Standards of work seen in Year 9 are average in English and mathematics, and higher in science. In almost all other subjects they are average and higher in design and technology. This performance reflects good progress for the students during their first three years at the college in almost all subjects and very good progress in mathematics and in design and technology.

Results are even better at GCSE, with students making much better progress from their Year 9 results than in most schools. They have risen steeply over the last two years, much more rapidly than in most schools. They now match the national averages for all maintained schools and are much higher than in other secondary modern schools. Best results in 2002

were in design and technology, business studies, art and history. Most other subjects were close to average or above, and only in German were they lower. Standards of work seen in Years 10 and 11 are at least average in all subjects. In English, science, art, design and technology and business studies, they are higher. This represents good progress in almost all subjects and very good progress in art, history and business studies.

Attainment on entry to the sixth form is lower than in most schools. Results at AS and A-level are below average but for the great majority of students they are higher than would be expected from their grades at GCSE. Results in vocational courses are even better and well above average in business studies and in travel and tourism. Standards of work are at least average and students make very good progress in almost all lessons.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	<b>Very good.</b> Students are proud of the college and want to do well.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	<b>Very good.</b> Students behave well and work hard in the great majority of lessons. Around the college, students are considerate, socialise well and there is a pleasant, civilised atmosphere.
Personal development and relationships	<b>Very good.</b> Students and staff get on very well together with a great deal of mutual respect. As a result, students grow in self-confidence and maturity.
Attendance	<b>Good.</b> Attendance is higher than in most schools and there is very little unauthorised absence.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Very Good</b>

*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.*

Teaching is good overall. The great majority of teachers are very effective in the classroom and this is a major strength of the school. Students and parents commented on how helpful and dedicated they are. About a third of lessons in the main school and half of the lessons in the sixth form are very good or excellent. This quality of teaching is largely responsible for the progress students make in the college. Unfortunately, the college has had problems recruiting teachers in some subjects despite strenuous efforts and a few are not as effective as their colleagues. Nevertheless, teaching in the main school is at least good in all subjects and very good in art, design and technology, geography, history, ICT and business studies. In the sixth form it is even better with English, physical education and religious education added to the list of subjects with very good teaching.

Teachers know their subjects well and make lessons interesting for the students. They are very successful in building up the students' self-confidence and helping them to believe they

can do well and learn. This is because work is carefully matched to students' needs, they are involved actively in lessons and their responses are treated with respect. Students with special educational needs are very well taught and make very good progress. Able, gifted and talented students are also supported well and achieve appropriately high results.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	<b>Good overall and very good in Years 7 to 9.</b> The staggered day works well and allows more flexibility than in most schools.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	<b>Very good.</b> Provision in the unit is excellent. In lessons, the quality of support is equally high when specialist staff are involved but they are not always available.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	No students currently need this provision.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	<b>Very good.</b> Spiritual development is good and provision for moral, social and cultural development is very good. These strengths have an important impact on students' positive approaches to learning and the way they grow in maturity.
How well the school cares for its pupils	<b>Very good.</b> Students feel secure and learn well as a result of the very effective support systems the college has developed.

The college has good links with parents. They are well informed and find the college easy to approach.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the principal and other key staff	<b>Very good overall.</b> The principal provides outstanding leadership and she is very well supported by the college's leadership team. Subject and Year Team Leaders also provide very effective leadership. There is very effective delegation of management roles and an unusually high level of commitment from staff at all levels.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	<b>Very good.</b> Governors are very effective. They are strongly committed to the college and bring a wide range of skills to bear on its success.
The school's evaluation of its performance	<b>Very good.</b> The college reviews its work very effectively and uses information to plan developments and set realistically challenging targets.
The strategic use of	<b>Very good.</b> Resources are used very effectively. Financial

resources	management is excellent.
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## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students work hard and make good progress.</li><li>• The college is approachable.</li><li>• Leadership and management are strong.</li><li>• Students grow in maturity.</li><li>• Teaching is good.</li><li>• Students like the college.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Homework – some teacher monitor homework more than others.</li><li>• Closer links with parents.</li></ul>

Inspectors agree with the parents' overwhelmingly positive views of the school. During the inspection homework was used effectively. The school works hard to establish links with parents and these are stronger than in most schools.

**INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM**

The sixth form is average sized with 123 male and 107 female students currently on roll. The great majority of the students have previously been at the college, with about 60 per cent of students moving from Year 11 into the sixth form. About 10 per cent of students join from other schools. Entry requirements to the sixth form are very flexible with candidates considered individually for their suitability for the courses they intend to follow. Overall, standards on entry are lower than in most sixth forms. The college provides a wide range of AS and A-level courses, together with some vocational courses at intermediate and advanced level.

**HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS**

The sixth form is very good. Students make good progress and achieve better results than would be expected from their results on entry. This is a result of the very good teaching they receive and their own very positive attitudes to work. They are supported well and given responsibilities in the college, which help them grow in maturity and self-reliance. Leadership and management are very good and standards have been maintained well as the sixth form has grown in size. The sixth form is cost effective.

**Strengths**

- Students make good progress.
- Teaching is very good.
- Support for students is very effective.
- Students' personal development is very good.

**What could be improved**

- There is not enough space for private study and access to ICT needs to be promoted.
- Procedures for recording attendance are not as good as in the main school.

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

## THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Good measures have been taken which have increased the number of students taking the subject. Students achieve results that are above the national average and display good attitudes to their work
Physics	<b>Good.</b> Results are above the national average. Students make good progress as a result of good teaching.
Design and technology	<b>Good.</b> Standards are above average as a result of very good teaching. The subject is recruiting more students each year and is justifiably popular.
Business studies	<b>Good.</b> Students are following appropriate advanced vocational courses. Standards are in line with national averages and the achievement of students is good. The quality of teaching and learning is good.
Information and communication technology	<b>Very good.</b> Students learn very well because of the high standards of teaching. They develop very well as independent learners and apply their computing skills well to the benefit of local companies.
Physical education	<b>Good.</b> Results were above average in 2001. Although students in 2002 achieved slightly below their predicted grades the present cohort are achieving very well as a result of some very good teaching although marking is not regular enough or rigorous enough.
Art and design	<b>Very good.</b> Results are well above average and continuing to improve. Students are highly motivated and are making very good progress. Teaching is very good with some excellent features, which results in very good learning
Music technology	<b>Good.</b> This new course has started well. It is taught well; students are responding very well and reaching appropriate standards.
History	<b>Very good.</b> Teaching is very good, and promotes very good learning. Students' attitudes are very positive, and relationships are excellent. Attainment overall is average.
Geography	<b>Very good.</b> Standards are above average, reflecting the very good teaching and very good progress that students make.
Religious education	<b>Very good.</b> Teaching and learning are very good. Students make good progress and standards are at the national level.
English	<b>Very good.</b> Students make very good progress as a result of very good teaching. Standards are in line with national averages and are improving.
Modern foreign languages	<b>Good.</b> Teaching is good and students do well compared to their performance at GCSE. The subject has made good progress since the last inspection.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	<b>Very well.</b> Students feel well supported and have very good relationships with their tutors. Their work is assessed carefully and they are given well-focused advice on how to improve. Support for their move into employment or the next stage of education is good, but students feel it is aimed mainly at helping them into higher education.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	<b>Very good.</b> Management of the sixth form is very well integrated with that of the whole college and benefits from its considerable strengths. There is the same determination that everyone can achieve well and an ethos of success has been established, with staff and students working in partnership.

## STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The commitment of staff and the quality of teaching.</li> <li>• Advice and support on how to improve.</li> <li>• The independence they are encouraged to develop.</li> <li>• The very positive atmosphere of the sixth form.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Careers advice for those not going into higher education.</li> <li>• Space to study in.</li> <li>• More and better ICT facilities.</li> </ul>

Inspectors agree with students positive views of the sixth form. They also agree that students need more space for private study and access to better ICT facilities, which the college is providing as part of its current building programme. Careers advice is good.

## COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

#### **The school's results and pupils' achievements**

1 Students at The Chalfonts Community College do very well. They achieve much higher standards than would be expected from their starting points when they join the school. This is because of the effective teaching and the students' belief in their own abilities that the college instils.

2 As a secondary modern school, The Chalfonts Community College draws its students from the 61 per cent who do not obtain places in Buckinghamshire grammar schools, together with a few from out of the catchment area. Consequently, it receives a much smaller proportion of higher attaining students into Year 7 than there would be in a fully comprehensive intake. However, by Year 9 the proportion of students who have reached the levels expected for their age on English, mathematics and science is very close to the national average.

3 Results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2002 were in line with the national average for all schools and well above the results in other secondary modern schools. Students make better progress than in most other schools to achieve these results and results are rising faster than the national trend. The best results were in mathematics, where they were above the national average and well above other secondary modern schools, reflecting very good progress since students joined the school. Mathematics results have improved dramatically over the last three years as a result of very effective leadership in the subject. Results in English were close to the national average for all schools and better than in other secondary modern schools. Science results were below the national average and similar to those in other secondary modern schools.

4 Results in these two subjects were adversely affected by staffing problems leading up to the tests, which have been partly resolved this year, so that standards currently seen in science and English are better than the 2002 test results indicate. Boys and girls performed equally well in mathematics, but the gaps between girls' and boys' results in English and science were even bigger than in most schools.

5 The work seen during the inspection in Years 7 to 9 was in line with national expectations in almost all subjects, with the exception of science and in design and technology where it is above. This picture reflects good progress from the starting points in Year 7 for almost all subjects and satisfactory progress in English, and citizenship.

6 Results are even better at GCSE, where they are well above other secondary modern schools. In 2002 the proportion of students gaining five or more passes at grade A\*-C was above the national average for all schools and the overall performance, taking into account all passes at GCSE, was in line with national averages. GCSE results were dipping between 1998 and 2000. They have risen strongly since then, reflecting the change in leadership in the school, and are set to continue rising. Boys' and girls' relative performance has fluctuated during this period, with boys doing much better than girls in 2001 and girls much better than boys in 2000. The gap was similar to the national picture in 2002 and, taken over the last five years, boys have been a little further below their national average than girls. Best results at GCSE in 2002 came from design and technology, business studies, art and history. Results in German were lower than the national average.

7 The work seen in Years 10 and 11 generally matches this picture with standards in most subjects at the expected level for students at this age. This is the case in mathematics, geography, history, modern foreign languages, music, physical education, religious education and citizenship. Standards are higher in English, science, art and design and design and technology. In business studies, they are much higher than usual. These standards represent strong progress, particularly in art, history and business studies.

8 The school is particularly successful in involving all its students and helping them to believe that they can do well. Those with special educational needs make very good progress throughout the school.

### **Sixth form**

9 Results in the sixth form overall are below the national average, mainly because students have lower qualifications at GCSE when they start their studies than in most sixth forms. The great majority achieve better grades than would be predicted from their entry qualifications, reflecting good progress overall. Results in the vocational subjects are strongest, well above the national average in business studies and travel and tourism. A-level results in 2002 were well above average in art, physical education and media studies. They were average in biology, geography, physics, design and technology and history, below average in English, history and ICT.

10 Work seen during the inspection in the sixth form was at least at the expected levels in all subjects, higher in physics, design and technology, geography, religious education and business studies and even better in art. This reflects good progress overall with particularly good progress in art, history and religious education.

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

11 Students' attitudes, behaviour, personal development and relationships are all very good. All of these aspects have been maintained since the time of the last inspection. Attendance is good, above the national average.

12 Overall, students have very good attitudes to learning. Discussions with students in all year groups confirm this. Almost all students say they enjoy college life; they are able to identify favourite subjects and a majority of students take part in the extra-curricular activities provided by the college. The majority of students are interested in what they are doing and take an active part in their learning. They listen carefully to their teachers' instructions, maintain concentration for appropriate periods of time and make positive contributions to classroom discussions. For example, in a Year 9 geography lesson where students were studying the world in the twentieth century, relationships were very good, students clearly enjoyed the lesson and all made very good contributions to classroom discussions. They co-operated well together, and listened with interest to the ideas and opinions of their peers. They worked hard and therefore made good progress during the lesson. Most students take a pride in their work; they are willing and able to talk about their work and explain their ideas to inspectors.

13 The overall standard of behaviour is very good in lessons and around the school. For example, in a Year 8 history lesson students' attitudes and behaviour were very good throughout the lesson. They worked hard and enthusiastically, they co-operated well together and with their teacher, they clearly wanted to learn and all these factors had a positive impact on their learning. In a few lessons, there were instances of students being involved in low level inappropriate behaviour. On almost all occasions this was when teaching lacked pace or challenge, and students lost interest in the lesson. Students are aware of what is and is

not acceptable behaviour. They have a good understanding of the school's system of rewards and sanctions. They readily accept the principle of sanctions as an appropriate response to instances of unsatisfactory behaviour. Before and after school, at lunchtimes and breaks, they chat and socialise well together without any signs of inappropriate behaviour. Racial harmony is good; however, there are a small number of recorded racist incidents, and the college takes these incidents seriously. Students treat the college's accommodation and equipment with care and respect and there is little litter around the college.

14 Bullying is an occasional problem, but the college has in place an anti-bullying policy that makes clear that it will not tolerate bullying, and the college reacts quickly to known instances of bullying. Parents and students have indicated that these procedures are effective. The number of students excluded in the last academic year was around the national average for a school of this type and size. Four boys were permanently excluded and there were 78 fixed term exclusions involving 49 boys and 10 girls. There has been an increase in the number of permanent exclusions in the current academic year: at the time of the inspection there had been six students permanently excluded. The increase is mainly due to the introduction of a 'zero tolerance' to drug taking and drug dealing. Inspection of the college's exclusion records indicate that the majority of exclusions have been as a result of violence or aggressive behaviour against staff or students, and the use of exclusion has been appropriate in the circumstances. The college has good procedures to ensure students have appropriate work to complete whilst excluded and to reintegrate them back into the college.

15 Students make good progress in their personal development. Relationships between staff and students are very good, so too are relationships between students. These relationships make a positive contribution to students' learning. Students are developing well their understanding of other people's faiths and cultures and are encouraged to reflect on the impact of their actions on others, mainly though their studies in religious education and personal social and health education. For example, in a Year 10 religious education lesson where students were discussing the Christian view of euthanasia, students responded with intense interest, concentration and sustained intellectual effort. Students made constructive and quite mature contributions to classroom discussion, which deepened and developed very well their understanding of the central concepts of the sanctity of life, murder and eternal life. Therefore they made good progress in their learning. Students in all year groups show a willingness to undertake additional responsibilities, including a range of duties such as classroom monitors and serving on year and college councils. For example, a significant number of Year 11 students undertake the role of prefects, whose duties include assisting tutors by listening to younger students read and checking students' planners. They also supervise students at lunchtime and assist at public events.

16 Attendance is good. Overall attendance is above the national average, whilst unauthorised absence is below national averages. This is an improvement since the last inspection when attendance was in line with national averages. Registration is undertaken morning and afternoon and meets statutory requirements.

### **Sixth form**

17 Students' attitudes, behaviour, personal development and relationships in the sixth form are all very good. Attendance is good.

18 Students' attitudes and behaviour were good or very good in nine out of ten lessons seen, and on occasions excellent. They were never less than satisfactory. Students are keen to learn, work very hard and make mature and constructive contributions to classroom discussions. They have good organisational abilities and independent learning skills. They

respect their teachers and consider the quality of teaching they receive is good. Students say that they are treated as mature and responsible adults and this helps them to study independently and enjoy their time in the sixth form. Behaviour outside of lessons is very good; students move around the college in an orderly manner, and at breaks and lunchtime they chat and socialise well together. One student was given a fixed term exclusion in the last academic year and there were no permanent exclusions. There have not been any exclusions in the current academic year.

19 Students make very good progress in their personal development. Relationships between staff and students are very good, so too are relationships between students. All students are involved in some form of service to the college community. This can include the prefect system, mentors for younger students, reading buddies and hosts at open evenings and public events. Many students are involved in organising social and charity fund-raising events. Students are aware that these activities are designed to develop their personal skills and enter into these roles in a conscientious manner and take their duties seriously.

20 Attendance in the sixth form is good. Overall, the retention rate on courses offered by the school is satisfactory with few students leaving their courses prematurely.

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

21 Overall, teaching is good, and in the sixth form it is very good. The commitment and dedication of its teachers are a major strength of the college. Students commented on this repeatedly and it was a strong feature of parents' comments to inspectors. The great majority of teachers are very effective in the classroom but the college has had problems employing staff in some subject areas. This has been much improved this year as a result of strenuous efforts on recruitment but there are still a few teachers who are not as effective as their colleagues.

22 During the inspection, about two thirds of lessons in the main school were good or better and half of these were very good or excellent. Almost all the rest were satisfactory with about one in 20 unsatisfactory. Almost all of the unsatisfactory ones were taught by inexperienced teachers or teachers new to this country. The more successful teachers tend to work with the older students and so teaching is even better in the Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form than in Years 7 to 9, which is reflected in the very good progress that students make in their GCSE courses.

23 In the main school, teaching is good in English, mathematics, science, modern foreign languages, music, physical education, religious education and citizenship. It is very good in all other subjects: art, design and technology, geography, history, ICT and business studies and for students with special educational needs. This uniformly strong picture explains why students do so well.

24 Teachers have good subject knowledge and often make lessons lively and interesting. The skill of teaching successfully is seen as very important in the college and frequently discussed. Lessons are planned carefully, with particular regard for the way different students learn. A great many lessons are taught with considerable enthusiasm and students commented that teachers have a real passion for their subject and for helping them to learn. They also said that teachers give them a lot of individual attention, often finding extra time out of lessons. This enthusiasm, skill and extra commitment are how teachers have earned the respect of students and parents.

25 Students respond very well to teaching. They answer questions willingly and grow in self confidence as a result of the positive way that teachers treat them. Discussions often form part of lessons and students take part actively, often expressing complex ideas clearly and effectively; for example a Year 10 history group discussed the use of images and language in Nazi propaganda with considerable insight and maturity.

26 Students' learning is very well supported by the feedback and encouragement they get from teachers. This includes the general encouragement they receive which successfully overcomes any sense of failure they have when they join the school and also specific advice and critical review of their work, which helps them to improve. Much of this happens through written comments on students' work. There is too much variation in the quality of this marking: some is excellent, for example in design and technology where teachers give detailed appraisals of work and clear advice on how to improve. At the other extreme some sets of books in English, for example, have nothing more than an occasional tick to indicate that the teacher has read anything that the student has written so far this year. This inadequate marking is mainly in younger classes taught by teachers new to this country and is one reason these groups do not make as much progress as others.

27 Teaching within the learning support base is very good. Since motivation is at the root of many of these students' problems, teachers and support assistants develop very good relationships whereby students are motivated to want to learn. Specialist teaching is always linked to a student's mainstream and curricular or extra-curricular needs. Teaching students with special educational needs within the classroom is not as consistently good. This is due to the fact that the work students are given to do and the resources they are expected to use are not always appropriate for their individual needs. The college recognises that this is an area where more work needs to be done. Teachers are well informed about the needs of individual students and many make good use of this information to set targets for each individual. Class teachers work closely with learning support assistants and value their contribution to lessons.

### **Sixth form**

28 Teaching is very good in the sixth form with almost nine out of ten lessons at least good and half of these very good or excellent. Teachers know their subjects well and adjust the work skilfully to the needs of the students. The only exception to this was a mathematics lesson for students re-taking their GCSE examination which was unsatisfactory because the teacher did not respond well enough to his students and gave them work and explanations which they had already failed to understand.

29 Overall, mathematics teaching in the sixth form is satisfactory. In science, modern foreign languages, music and business studies teaching is good and in all other subjects inspected, English, art, design and technology, geography, history, ICT, physical education and religious education, it is very good.

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

30 Overall, the quality and range of learning opportunities for students are good. In Years 7 to 9, they are very good. The curriculum is broad and balanced, and meets the National Curriculum requirements. Teaching time is above the national recommendations for Years 7 to 9 and well above for Years 10 and 11. The staggered daily timetable works well. It allows the college to cope well with the large student population, and it allows for a greater student choice of options in Years 10 and 11. Thus the curriculum helps to foster learning and to

provide high achievement with a focus on progression. During Years 7 to 9, students study all the subjects of the National Curriculum, religious education, personal, social and health education and citizenship. The quality and range of the curriculum are good in history, art, design and technology, modern foreign languages and geography. They are very good in ICT. The provision for students with special educational needs is also very good.

31 In Years 10 and 11, students take a broad range of courses that contribute to the core National Curriculum. This is broadened by the addition of a work-related curriculum, which offers a range of courses that are more suitable for students who benefit from pursuing a vocation-oriented curriculum. The courses are held at Amersham and Wycombe College of Further Education, where students can study motor vehicle engineering, hairdressing, electronics, beauty and child care. These students receive a great deal of benefit from this course, which has improved their motivation and attitude to college. Students have the opportunity to take GCSE statistics as well as mathematics. The quality and range of provision in most subject areas are good and there is very good provision for students with special education needs and in ICT. Provision in modern foreign languages is, however, no better than satisfactory because it allows for the study of only one modern foreign language. Religious education is taught according to the agreed syllabus, and nearly all students undertake a half-course GCSE in the subject. A good citizenship programme is offered mostly, but not exclusively, under the aegis of a carefully structured personal, social and health education programme, that includes careers work. There is a useful two-week work-experience programme. These courses notwithstanding, the college does not have a wide enough range of courses for all of its students. The college recognises this and has plans to introduce a wider range of vocational courses in the new academic year.

32 The college makes good provision for extending the curriculum by arranging for visitors to speak to students and for students to take part in conferences, visit museums and theatres and work in the local area. There are visits abroad and international visitors come to the college. There are a number of subject-based clubs and homework clubs to support learning. Activities include water-skiing for disabled students, craft workshop, web page design club and singing. In addition, a wide range of sports are popular along with more esoteric activities, such as Robot Club and Young Chef of the Year.

33 The provision for students' personal, social and health education is good. Many elements of the citizenship course are also taught in personal social and health education lessons. The programme in Years 7 to 9 includes all the required elements such as advice on drugs misuse and sex education. The course is important in enabling students to develop skills, attitudes, values and independence. The course is well planned, broad and balanced and meets the needs of students. In Year 7 the programme is delivered by form tutors and in Years 8 to 10 by a more specialist team of teachers. There is no timetabled programme in Year 11. The teaching of personal social and health education is good. Teachers plan lessons well and are very clever at providing students with enough information to encourage discussion and debate but not providing too much so that lessons become a monologue from the teacher.

34 The college provides very well for students' personal development. Provision has remained very good since the last inspection. The college has no specific policy on promotion of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of students' personal development and has no record of which subjects teach these aspects. The college did, however, take an initiative about three years ago to raise the level of teachers' awareness of the importance of this area. The college's joint approach to personal development and educational success is embodied in arrangements for student support and progression. At subject level lack of planning is clear but teachers are good at taking opportunities as they arise.

35 Provision for students' spiritual development is good. The college has continued since the last inspection to be a community that fosters students' self-esteem and promotes a culture of success. The college is inclusive in spirit and seeks to integrate all, whatever their gifts or impairments. Teachers are good role models and students learn to respect each other's beliefs and feelings. Assemblies are valuable occasions but only occur once a week and opportunities to experience collective worship in tutorial time are inconsistent. The 'Thought for the Day' is a potentially powerful opportunity for reflection but not all tutors use it well. Religious education makes its own distinctive contribution to students' spiritual development and ICT provides a very good but different type of reflection on deeply human issues. In art, students have the opportunity to be introspective through the process of self-portraiture. More prominent and pervasive than the contributions of particular subject areas, however, is the spirit of generosity and support throughout the college.

36 Provision for students' moral development is very good. The college has a well-understood code of behaviour displayed in every classroom. The rights and wrongs of life feature in many lessons and help students to develop a mature sense of morality. Moral issues arise and teachers discuss them in different subjects. The programme of personal and social education is a planned and structured sequence of topics that contributes well to moral awareness. Students discuss personal, social and environmental issues, from the ethics of foxhunting to questions of self-harm through the abuse of drugs. The introduction of a GCSE short course in religious education has ensured that students in Years 10 and 11 have the opportunity to consider moral issues from a religiously informed point of view. In history students study the policy of appeasement before the Second World War and discuss whether it was right or wrong. Moral issues are addressed in science when students look at topics such as human reproduction and nuclear power. These lessons all help to promote moral responsibility.

37 Provision for students' social development is very good. Opportunities for collaborative learning occur in many subjects. In physical education students have many such opportunities through working in small groups. Group work is also a strong feature in art, business studies, geography, history, ICT, modern foreign languages and music and in personal social and health education but not in mathematics. The programme of personal and social education includes consideration of personal and sexual relationships. Further opportunities for social development occur through peer mentoring, the bullying forum and the prefect system. Peer mentors are trained to help younger students. Students benefit from the experience of being prefects and make a varied and valued contribution to the life of the school. The college council consists of elected representatives from each tutor group and is a practical expression of the school's commitment to the development of the skills of citizenship. The annual drama production is an opportunity for many students to develop socially.

38 Provision for students' cultural development is very good. Art and music are strong subjects and present a wide picture of different traditions. In art students look at their own environment as a source for artistic expression and have opportunities for trips to galleries and abroad. In music, students experience music from around the world and have opportunities to appreciate African, Caribbean and Indian traditions. In English, students study poetry arising from different cultural traditions and give their responses to ideas and feelings that come from a different experience of life. In geography, students learn about the 'One Child' programme in China and are invited to give their views. In religious education, students learn about the range of cultures expressed in different religions, such as Christianity, Islam and Sikhism. The college has relatively few students from ethnic minorities and is not in itself a resource for ethnic and cultural diversity that enriches students' experience. The senior leadership team, however, seeks to create a climate of respect for all races and cultures.

39 Overall, careers education and guidance are satisfactory. Careers education is delivered mainly through the personal social and health education course. Students undertake a valuable fortnight's work experience in Year 10. The careers library is comprehensive and accessible. There is very good liaison with the Connexions Agency who provide very effective support to the college.

40 In line with the Code of Practice for special educational needs, the college aims to provide full access to a broad and balanced curriculum, which is relevant to the needs of all students. All students follow the National Curriculum except where there is an overriding reason for them to be withdrawn. On these occasions students undertake further work in areas that will be beneficial to their academic development. Support for students in the classroom is concentrated in subjects where the students' needs are greatest. In most subjects all students are expected to do GCSE, although a few subject departments offer other courses such as the Certificate of Achievement. Some students in Years 10 and 11 follow a reduced timetable. On some days they attend further education colleges or extended work experience placements. An inclusion group operates one afternoon each fortnight for some students with behavioural difficulties. Students with special educational needs are encouraged to participate in a range of extra-curricular activities.

41 The transitional arrangements from Year 6 to Year 7 are very good and are co-ordinated by the leader of Year 7. College staff meet with Year 6 teachers and pupils and collect information relating to pupils' academic ability, family background and any welfare issues including any special educational needs. This information is used to make tutor groups and is provided to tutors. Parents are invited to an open evening at which they meet with the principal, the leader of Year 7 and their children's tutor. Year 6 pupils visit the college for a taster day when they spend time in their tutor groups and attend taster lessons. During the summer holiday college staff contact all new parents to ensure parents are happy with the arrangements for their children to start college in the autumn term. There are good arrangements for the induction of Year 7 students into the college. Year 7 students start one day before the rest of the student body, and spend most of the first day with their tutors. Students complete a survey at the end of their first week to see how they have settled into the college. Any concerns are tackled immediately.

42 Overall, the college has established some very good links with partner schools primarily through its status as a Technology College. There are very close links with four of the college's primary feeder schools and two secondary schools. These links involve interaction between staff in mathematics, design and technology, science and ICT. For example, college staff share good practice in teaching to National Curriculum levels 5 and 6, which assists primary staff to raise the attainment of their above average pupils, whilst primary staff share good practice in teaching level 4, which assists college staff with below average pupils. Links with a specialist sports school have provided pupils with basketball coaching and access to a specialist dance teacher. Good links with colleges of further education and universities provide students with good quality information and guidance about the options and choices available to them post-16.

### **Sixth form**

43 Provision in the sixth form meets statutory requirements. Religious education is part of the provision of a general studies programme which is an enrichment programme rather than a preparatory programme to prepare students for the A-level general studies examination. Provision for citizenship in the sixth form is taught through the general studies programme. A wide range of topics is discussed and debated. Sometimes these are led by external speakers. For example, the local MP has been to talk to the sixth form about political

literacy, legal systems, rights and the law. Such provision enables students to develop a mature sense of citizenship. The college is responding to the students' needs and courses in psychology and music technology and the CISCO course in information technology networking are additional optional courses. Furthermore, AVCE courses are offered in business studies, leisure and tourism, and travel and tourism. However, despite the fact that the college holds vocational and academic courses in equal esteem, there is still a high proportion of students on the latter.

44 Provision for personal development in the sixth form is very good. The college encourages students to be supportive to each other and to younger students. One major input is the weekly assembly. Another is the enrichment programme of general studies. This consists mainly of speakers from within the college or outside and affords students opportunities to develop spiritually, morally, socially and culturally. A recent talk by an MP promoted much discussion of current issues such as the war in Iraq and top-up fees in higher education. The religion and ethics conference is an important annual occasion valued by students. The quality of tutorial provision promotes not only success in examinations but also students' own personal development.

### **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?**

45 The college provides a very good standard of care for its students. It provides a friendly and welcoming environment in which students feel happy and secure, and can learn and develop. Students are provided with a very good level of academic and personal support. The college's procedures for student support and progression are very well organised and have a positive impact on students' learning. There are very good procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour and attendance.

46 The college's procedures for student support and progression are well organised by one of the vice-principals who works closely with year leaders. They meet on a regular basis to discuss any concerns about students' behaviour, progress and personal development. Form tutors and year leaders know their students very well and are responsive to students' needs both inside and outside the classroom. Staff value their students: where possible form tutors and year leaders stay with their students throughout their time in the college and this enhances the continuity of care. Students say that this continuity has increased their confidence in approaching staff should they have any problems of either an academic or personal nature, and they are confident that appropriate advice and guidance would be forthcoming. Tutors make contact with parents whenever necessary, often by telephone, to resolve potential problems at an early stage. Student support is further enhanced by the availability of an independent counselling service and the attendance of a fully qualified nurse available throughout the college day.

47 Prior to entry to the college all students receive a telephone call from a member of the Senior Leadership Team, which effectively serves the purpose of reassuring them and welcoming them to the college. On entry to the college students are allocated a tutor who normally remains with them until they leave. Tutors work closely with year team leaders to provide effective support and advice. Files on students are regularly updated to provide a record of their progress and personal development as well as behaviour, punctuality and attendance.

48 Students are aware that the college provides counseling and mentoring should it be needed. Staff are informed daily about students' personal circumstances and any changes that may have taken place. A meeting every half term gives students an opportunity to talk over any problems that may have arisen. A fully qualified nurse is on site at all times during

the college day. Good mentoring programmes involve members of the community who work at establishing social skills with targeted students. Mentoring takes place between Year 10 students and those in Year 7. The local pupil referral unit assists the college in setting up 'anger management' programmes for a minority of students.

49 The college has in place a health and safety policy that meets statutory requirements. The day-to-day management of health and safety is the responsibility of the college's business and finance director, who is responsible for co-ordinating the implementation of health and safety policy. Subject leaders are responsible for carrying out regular risk assessments. There are good procedures to ensure the health and safety of students on residential trips and educational visits, including risk assessment. All necessary fire procedures are in place and regular fire drills are carried out. Overall first aid provision is good, there are sufficient numbers of qualified first aiders and good records are maintained of students' injuries and treatment. Inspection of portable electrical equipment indicates that the periodic testing of this type of equipment meets statutory requirements. Overall, arrangements for child protection are satisfactory although the policy is too brief. One of the vice-principals is the designated teacher and along with two other members of staff has received appropriate child protection training. However, the college's child protection policy is very brief and does not contain sufficient information of the types of child abuse they may encounter, the signs and symptoms of abuse and the procedures to be followed should allegations be made against staff. Training for staff consists of raising staff awareness of child protection procedures at the beginning of each academic year.

50 The college has zero tolerance with regard to illegal drugs. A policy includes information on support and guidance and a copy is sent to every parent. Where there are causes for concern the college works closely with the local education authority support team who then work with students to encourage them to make responsible decisions for themselves.

51 Overall the college has good procedures for monitoring and promoting good attendance. The college has in place an attendance policy designed to ensure a consistent approach in dealing with attendance. Tutors mark registers morning and afternoon and class registers are taken at the start of all lessons. The college's attendance officer monitors registers on a daily basis, operates 'first day call' for students with poor attendance and monitors punctuality. Year leaders are provided with weekly print-outs of students' attendance, follow up students with attendance less than 90 per cent and make contact with parents as appropriate. If a student's attendance falls below 80 per cent their attendance is subject to discussion with the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) who attends the college every three weeks to hold discussions with year leaders about students whose attendance is a cause for concern. At these meetings appropriate action is agreed and recorded. The college actively promotes good attendance; at assemblies students are awarded certificates for 100 per cent attendance or vastly improved attendance, and year team leaders undertake spot checks in lessons to check for any post-registration truancy.

52 The college has good procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour. There is a well-established college behaviour policy that provides a system of rewards and sanctions. The rewards system is popular with students who readily accept the principle of sanctions as an appropriate response to poor behaviour. The college maintains very good records of student behaviour on a central database which is available to all members of staff. The college has a good awareness of the minority of students whose behaviour is a cause of concern and has established a number of initiatives designed to improve the behaviour of these students, many of whom are considered to be at risk of exclusion. These initiatives include: placing students on report, whereby tutors or year team leaders monitor their behaviour on a daily basis; anger management, which allows either staff or student to initiate

a 'Time Out' in order to avoid confrontations in classrooms; and flexible timetables that include vocational courses. Bullying is an occasional problem and the college makes clear that bullying will not be tolerated. A member of staff has been designated to deal with any bullying that occurs. He supervises the bullying forum that consists of a group of students who have been trained by external specialists to counsel victims of bullying. Generally these initiatives are successful in moderating the behaviour of the students concerned and minimise disruption to the learning of the vast majority of students.

53 Procedures for the support and guidance of students with special educational needs are very good. Students are fully included in the life of the college and make very good progress. Other students are helpful and supportive, particularly of students with physical and sensory problems. There is effective focus on students who are underachieving and all of these students are actively involved in the assessment of their performance. Individual education plans are in place for all students requiring them and teachers make very good use of them in their day-to-day classroom activities. Very effective procedures for the identification and assessment of students with special educational needs are in place and are understood by all staff. A number of initiatives have been set up to support students, for example the homework club, the paired reading scheme and spelling progress units. The department has built up a large computer database containing detailed records of all students with special educational needs. Extensive use is made of the college's computer network to inform staff about students with special needs.

54 The college's educational and personal support and guidance are successful in raising students' achievement. A recent initiative has seen the setting up of an inter-agency liaison committee. Chaired by the vice-principal, this committee discusses students who may have difficulties at home, who show signs of ill health or who have behavioural or attendance issues. An inclusion project for students with emotional and behavioural difficulties enables them to participate in a range of off-site outdoor education activities, which develop individual as well as team-building skills. There is very good flexibility in the college's approach towards students who have difficulty coping with the full demands of the curriculum. In recent years a partnership with Uxbridge College and Asmersham and Wycombe College has been established to provide more practical courses for a small number of Year 10 and 11 students, for whom the full range of GCSEs is not appropriate.

## **Assessment**

55 The college's procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are good. Students' attainment and progress are assessed and monitored regularly. The college has a very effective computerised system for recording and monitoring the attainment and progress of its students from Year 7 to Year 11. The wide range of data available means that subject teachers, subject leaders, form tutors and year team leaders all have access to very detailed information about their students. This information can be easily and quickly accessed via the college's computer network. The system enables staff to analyse the data in a variety of ways, such as by tutor group, by subject set, or by gender. Subject leaders compare the attainment and progress of different teaching groups, and evaluate the overall performance of their departments. Year team leaders discuss attainment and progress data with subject leaders. In this way the college makes effective links between the academic and pastoral aspects of students' progress. This detailed monitoring and analysis is a contributory factor to the good progress students make from Years 7 to 11. Students themselves are well aware of their own attainment and targets. The college quickly identifies under-achievement and takes measures to deal with it, by involving the students and parents or carers in discussions about the reasons for any under-performance.

56 All departments have effective assessment procedures. They assess accurately to National Curriculum levels and to GCSE grades. The quality of marking varies from unsatisfactory in music to very good in design and technology, geography and ICT. It is satisfactory in mathematics, science and modern foreign languages, and good in English, art, history, religious education and business studies. However there is considerable variation within departments; for example in English some teachers' marking is very detailed and helpful whilst others rarely write comments on their students' work. With the exception of physical education and religious education, all subjects set targets in their marking to help students to improve their work.

57 There is, however, a weakness, in that there is no consistent scheme for marking across the college or even within many departments. This creates an unnecessarily complicated system for the students to work with and does not always provide them with the information they need in order to improve.

58 The reporting of students' attainment and progress is good. Parents and carers receive two progress reports and one full report each year. The comments on the full reports are clearly subject-specific, and are detailed and helpful. However, in a few cases, tutors and subject teachers have not addressed the issue of students whose performance has declined.

### **Physically disabled and hearing impaired pupils**

59 The college has been designated a local authority centre of excellence for physically disabled and hearing impaired students. The college currently has five students attached to the department and a further three for whom support is provided. There is an effective system in place, which has established key workers for each of the students needing a high level of support. Appropriate awareness of the needs and stresses that students' families may face enables the college to actively support them. Although students with physical disabilities have access to most parts of the school, further improvements have been agreed and funded and should be in place by the end of the year.

60 The department works hard to ensure a balance between the physical, social and academic needs of students. Where appropriate, students have full access to all areas of the curriculum. Recently there has been close liaison with the physical education department to ensure that all students take part in some form of physical activity during the week. Personal physiotherapy programmes are carried out in a purpose-built room. These are good social occasions as well as being physically demanding for each individual.

61 The manager of the physically disabled and hearing impaired department is also the special educational needs governor and as such has a good insight into the work of the department as a whole. She has a lot of contact with families of students and has a very good understanding of problems faced at home. She is an excellent team leader and is regarded highly by her learning support assistants.

### **Sixth form**

62 The college has very good procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress in the sixth form, which makes very effective use of ICT. Students' attainment and progress are assessed and monitored regularly. The range of data available means that subject teachers, subject leaders, form tutors and the leader of sixth form all have access to very detailed information about their students, which they can easily and quickly access via the college's computer network.

63 The system enables staff to analyse the data in a variety of ways, such as by tutor group, by subject set, or by gender. As a result subject leaders can compare the attainment and progress of different groups and evaluate the overall performance of their departments. The leader of sixth form monitors and analyses all aspects of the attainment and progress of the sixth form students very closely. This detailed monitoring and analysis contributes to the good progress that students make in Years 12 and 13. Students themselves are well aware of their own attainment and targets. The college quickly identifies under-achievement and takes effective measure to deal with it, by involving the students and parents or carers in discussions about the reasons for any under-performance.

64 All departments have effective assessment procedures in the sixth form. They assess accurately to public examination grades. Marking is good overall, and in almost all subjects the comments on students' work are detailed and helpful in showing students how to improve further.

65 The quality of advice, guidance and support for students in the sixth form is good. During Year 11, students receive good information and guidance about opportunities for continuing their education post-16, primarily from the leader of the sixth form who works closely with the careers guidance service. All students have taster sessions and an interview with a member of the senior leadership group. At the sixth form information evening, parents and students look at predicted GCSE results, consider future career ambitions and discuss with teachers the appropriate courses to match these ambitions. In discussions, students have indicated that they are satisfied with the advice and guidance they receive prior to entry to the sixth form.

66 Procedures for student induction are good and help students to settle quickly into their new courses. Students are assigned tutor groups and wherever possible they remain with their tutor throughout their time in the sixth form. The form tutor is available at convenient times to give advice and guidance on academic and personal problems, on a confidential basis if necessary. However, procedures for recording students' attendance are less rigorous than in the main school. Early in their first term students receive specific advice in study skills to assist them in their learning. The good level of pastoral support enables students to concentrate on their studies.

67 Students have a good amount of academic support. Students' work is assessed quickly and constructive comments provide guidance to students on how to improve their work. Students meet with their tutors on a daily basis. Tutors maintain good records of students' academic and personal development and these are used in the termly review of progress to set targets for future development. The programme of advice and guidance relating to university entrance is well planned and provides useful information and help for students. In the summer term the college hosts a Progression Evening. Parents and students are invited to listen to talks from employers, universities, Connexions and other organisations, and to ask questions about the options open to them. Students have access to a wide range of guidance material in the Learning Resource Centre including diagnostic software packages both for students going into higher education and for those seeking employment.

68 Advice to students and their parents about post-16 education and employment is informative and there are good opportunities for Year 11 students to discuss what is available to them after GCSEs. A sixth form induction week is run in the summer term of Year 11 to help students to make important decisions about advanced courses.

69 The students' questionnaires indicated that they had some concerns about the advice and guidance they received, for example, how their work was assessed. Students felt that they were not well informed about their progress. However, in both formal and informal

discussions with students, inspectors did not find any support for these concerns; almost all students had very positive views of the sixth form and were pleased with the advice and guidance available to them.

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

70 The college has established a good partnership with parents, that has been maintained since the last inspection. There was a good level of response to the parents' questionnaire with a return of 40 per cent and more than 60 parents attended the parents' meeting. Overall, parents' views of the college are very good. The majority of parents are pleased with the progress their children make in their learning, the quality of teaching and the expectation that their children will work hard. Parents also indicated that their children enjoyed coming to the college, that the college is helping their children to become more mature. They were confident that the college would respond positively to any concerns they may have. The parents felt that the college is well led and managed. Evidence from the inspection supports these positive views of the college.

71 A minority of parents expressed some concerns, including information about their children's progress, student behaviour, homework provision, how closely the college works with parents and the scope of activities outside of lessons. Inspectors were of the view that overall behaviour is very good, the use of homework is satisfactory, the college works hard to involve parents in the college and provision for extra-curricular activities is good. However, inspectors agree that the quality of some students' reports could be improved.

72 Parents' involvement in the life of the college is good. The college works hard to involve parents in their children's learning, for example by sending out focused questionnaires to ensure parents' views are taken into account in the college's decision-making process, and has acted on the views expressed by parents, for example by including National Curriculum levels on students' reports and an explanation of what these levels represent. The college provides regular events for parents, for example, a drugs education evening. Some parents have pledged substantial funds to the college through the gift aid initiative. Form tutors and year leaders indicate that they have good relationships with parents and receive strong parental support when required. Student planners enable parents to actively support their children's learning at home, and communicate any concerns they may have directly to tutors. During the summer holiday college staff contact parents of prospective Year 7 and Year 9 students to ensure parents are happy with the arrangements for their children to join the college in Year 7 and GCSE options respectively. There is an active parents association, which organises social and fund-raising events. The association has raised substantial funds that have been used to provide additional learning resources. Overall the college's links with parents have a positive impact on students' learning at college and at home.

73 The quality and range of information for parents are good. The college prospectus and governors' annual report are well presented and provide a wide range of information about the college and its activities. In addition, parents receive a calendar of events, together with regular newsletters and letters about specific events, all of which ensure parents are well informed about the college and its activities. The college provides parents with copies of new or revised school policies at the beginning of each academic year. Parents receive two interim and one full report about their children's progress. The format of these reports has been developed after consultation with parents. Generally reports are of good quality and provide information on students' strengths and weaknesses as well as areas for development. However, there are weaknesses in the content of some reports: for example instances where students' attainment and effort have deteriorated over time, sometimes in more than one subject, are not always addressed in comments by tutors and subject

teachers. Parents are invited to two open evenings a year, one with their children's tutor and one to discuss progress with subject teachers; attendance at these meetings is very good. There are good arrangements for parents of students with special educational needs to be involved in the development of their children's individual education plans.

74 Regular contact with parents is actively encouraged and support programmes are negotiated with students and their families. The parents of all students who have special educational needs which were identified in the primary schools are telephoned prior to their children entering the college and thereafter their views are regularly sought. Learning support staff take part in all parent consultation days and subject consultation evenings. The use of a home/school book for students with organisational difficulties ensures useful daily contact with some parents. The college is committed to supporting parents as well as students.

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

75 The principal leads the college outstandingly well. She has an extremely clear vision for the college based on achieving the best possible education for its students. Her infectious enthusiasm has established an ethos in which students feel valued and believe they can do well. Staff in the college feel part of a successful team and are unusually well committed to the college's aims as a result of her leadership. Her energetic pursuit of excellence has led directly to the very good progress that the college has made since she took it over in 1999.

76 The principal's leadership is very well supported by the two vice-principals and by the other members of the leadership team. Members of the group have distinct roles, which are all carried out very successfully and as a group they work particularly well together. They share the principal's strong belief in the college and its students and bring their different skills and expertise together effectively. Ideas are developed, challenged and extended very openly as a result of the high degree of professional trust and respect that has been established in the team. There is also an atmosphere of pride and enjoyment in being part of the college which is successfully transmitted to virtually everyone who works there.

77 Management in the school is very effective. Systems are in place to ensure that things run smoothly and very effective use is made of administrative support to ensure that teachers can concentrate on their students' learning and that managers are not bogged down in detail. The college's business manager plays a vital part in this. Her role encompasses that of a conventional bursar in which she has established exemplary procedures for monitoring and controlling expenditure and extends well beyond into financial modelling for the college and development of business ventures which generate extra funds for its work. Almost all subjects are led and managed very well and these skills are being developed well by the support and training provided by the college.

78 The governing body is very effective in carrying out its work. Governors are well informed about the college and have a clear understanding of their role and where that is separate from the college's daily management. Governors support the college very effectively and have dealt with difficult situations, such as the Funding Agency for Schools investigation, skilfully and sensitively. They bring a whole range of expertise to their work. In particular, they keep careful oversight of the budget and use funding imaginatively to help the college, for example providing affordable accommodation for key staff. From their experience as a Grant Maintained School, they still maintain a responsible officer and organise annual audits to ensure that they keep a firm grasp on the budget.

79 The work of the college is monitored very effectively by its managers. Each subject area and year group has its work reviewed on a two-year cycle. The reports of this

assessment are perceptive and detailed with clear recommendations for development. These are very effective tools for school improvement and have played a significant part in developments such as broadening approaches for teaching and learning. However, not all departments have produced action plans based on the points for development in their report. Regular monitoring of the work in the college has ensured that senior staff know which teachers need extra support but monitoring has not identified the unevenness in marking that exists in the college.

80 The process of financial planning is excellent and is very well organised by the college's business and finance manager. The governing body is appropriately involved in the development and monitoring of the college's three-year strategic plan and annual college development plan (CDP) and budget. The governors have established appropriate financial limits of delegated authority. Educational priorities are identified in the CDP and are supported by careful financial planning. Overall procedures for financial monitoring and control are detailed in a very comprehensive manual of financial procedures and regulations, and random inspection of some of the Colleges financial transactions indicate these procedures are very effective. The college has excellent procedures to ensure that the principles of best values are embedded into both financial and managerial processes.

81 The college provides an excellent level of administrative support for senior management and teaching staff at all levels, ensuring that senior managers and teachers are able to concentrate on their managerial and teaching roles. Many of the administrative staff also support students' learning, for example by listening to students read.

82 The last report, whilst finding the accommodation largely satisfactory, identified a number of weaknesses. Planning delays had held up the extensive building programme designed to address these difficulties, but that has now been completed. Since then the school has moved to 11+ entry, adding over 300 students to the roll and two new building programmes have been completed successfully. The staggered start and finish to the school day has done much to alleviate the problems this produced and gives maximum access to the specialist classrooms.

83 The accommodation is now good overall. The English, mathematics, science, ICT and modern foreign language rooms are all good. The science laboratories have recently been refurbished. Art and special educational needs accommodation is very good. Most of the other subject accommodation is satisfactory although for many of these subjects the rooms are too small for large classes, especially when practical work is being done. This is particularly true in history, design and technology and one of the music rooms. The lack of adequate storage presents problems in English and music. The only unsatisfactory subject accommodation is in business studies but the subject will move to the new building currently nearing completion. When this happens in August 2003 the last temporary building will be able to be removed.

84 The previous inspection identified the lack of wheelchair access and action to address this as an issue. A major review has now been done and appropriate steps are being taken where possible. There are a number of bids in, to improve the accommodation including girls' toilets and the physical education changing rooms. The old classroom wooden window frames are rotting and paint is peeling. They are being replaced on a rolling programme that is well on track for completion within the planned four-year cycle.

85 Accommodation for special needs is very good. Since the last inspection the learning support base has been completely refurbished. Two multi-purpose rooms are well appointed in the heart of the college. One has specialist facilities for disabled students. The creation of a new physiotherapy room has enhanced the provision for physically disabled students. The

college has good facilities and access for disabled students and members of the public. Where there is no access to higher floors, classes are moved to the ground floor. Further development of facilities is due to take place now that the college has been designated a centre of excellence for disabled students.

86 The business and financial director has taken many ambitious initiatives to improve the college facilities. Cleaning is done in-house by a small team of full-time site staff, assisted by properly remunerated sixth formers after school. These students derive many social and leadership benefits from doing this. The cleaning is done very well and the financial savings made are considerable. The school shop also makes a major financial contribution to the overall budget. The site is an open one and during the inspection no litter was seen outside and litter by the dining and vending areas was soon cleared. No graffiti was seen. The dining areas are surprisingly small for so large a school and it is a tribute to the students' attitudes to their school that they manage the congestion this causes so well.

87 Arrangements for the professional appraisal of teaching and all support staff through performance management are very good. This is one of a number of systems for evaluating the quality of teaching, assessing the extent to which targets have been met, mentoring staff and identifying professional development needs. The work is fundamental to the continued development of all staff and very effectively underpins the raising standards of attainment in the college.

88 The continuing professional development of all staff is given a high priority. The annual staff conference has been well established for ten years. This conference brings together all those adults who work in the college, the governors and where appropriate members of the wider community who support the college. It is an opportunity for new staff to meet colleagues, to share experience and to become part of the family that is the staff at The Chalfonts Community College. It is highly valued by new and established colleagues.

89 Professional development needs are also identified through the college development plan, subject leaders' development plans and the strategic plans set out as part of the funding made available through Technology College status. Planning also takes fully into account the needs of newly-qualified teachers. The co-ordination of these multiple needs is skilfully handled, available finance carefully prioritised and results fully evaluated. The college has recently been successful in gaining renewal of its Investors in People status and has recently received the prestigious Charter Mark award. These awards recognise the quality of, and commitment to, continuing staff development.

90 The college runs a demanding and well-respected programme of seminars to support the induction of newly-qualified teachers and other staff new to the college. The programme draws upon the experience of college staff and external providers. It is highly valued by those who participate. For many years the college has participated fully in arrangements for the initial training of teachers. The staff responsible have first class experience in meeting the needs of trainees from across the spectrum of different training routes. As a result there are very good links with a range of training institutions, the Open University, and the graduate trainee scheme.

91 The college has a large and very good team of teachers in all the subjects of the curriculum. However, recruitment and retention of teachers is a continuing problem and places a considerable burden on the time of the principal. The range of strategies used to find, encourage, house and keep staff in some key subjects, is quite outstanding. The cost of the exercises places very real demands on the college budget for this purpose. There have been recent problems in the recruitment of teachers in English, science, ICT and business studies. The recruitment of overseas teachers has been partially successful, but different

expectations, conditions of service and levels of salary required do not make this a long-term solution. Nevertheless the match of teachers and support staff to the curriculum is good.

92 Staffing for special educational needs is adequate although the department is never able to meet all teachers' requests for support within lessons. The quality of specialist staff and learning support assistants is excellent and as a team they work very effectively.

93 Resources for learning in the college are good. There is a new Learning Resource Centre, which was built and re-stocked just three years ago. The process of sorting out old books and replacing them with new stock is ongoing. There is a full range of books covering the whole curriculum and in addition a broad range of books for recreational reading is available. There is a fully computerised Learning Resource Centre and there are 22 computers in the 'hub' and another 7 downstairs. These can be used at lunchtime for research purposes only and they provide sixth form students with ample time for personal study. However, ICT provision in the college generally is not as good as it should be and is only just satisfactory at the moment. There are several interactive whiteboards and most staff, but not all, have been given laptops. The special educational needs department is well resourced and has a wide range of books for specialist literacy teaching. The provision of suitable reading books for the department has been planned jointly with the learning resource manager. Provision in most subject areas such as English, science, mathematics, geography and art and design is good. There are ICT facilities in every laboratory and teachers have their own laptops. However, there is a shortage of textbooks in some areas such as design and technology and history. In business studies, provision is unsatisfactory as there are insufficient textbooks, which results in many students having to buy their own. There are computers in the business studies area, but the machines are not linked to the Internet. However, some business studies lessons are timetabled in networked ICT rooms.

94 The college has an outstanding special educational needs department incorporating a physically disabled and hearing impaired unit. It continues to have a high profile within the college. The quality of its leadership and management is excellent. High quality documentation is very informative and supports the work of the department. A recent self-evaluation exercise has been very well conducted and outlines how new systems, which have been designed and introduced by the learning support department, meet the needs of students and parents. There is regular contact with the special educational needs governor who is a member of the department. The college is effectively operating the Code of Practice and is complying with legal requirements in respect of its statemented students.

95 The special needs department is well resourced and has a very wide range of books, materials and ICT resources to support students' learning in literacy and numeracy. The department has access to the college network and to the Internet.

## **Sixth form**

### ***Leadership and management***

96 The leadership of the sixth form is very strong. The acting leader of the sixth form (a member of the senior management team who was at one time the leader of the sixth form) continues to implement the college's strategies for the further expansion and improvement of the already successful sixth form. She has a clear vision about the future of the sixth form,

and ensures that in its work the sixth form fully reflects the college's aims and values. The sixth form is very well managed. A weakness, however, is the system which allows students to sign in and out when they do not have timetabled lessons. The system, as it currently works, does not give the college clear information about which students are on the site any one time.

97 The college has been prepared to offer new courses and new ways of teaching (for example using video links) in order to expand the sixth form provision and offer courses suitable for a range of needs. Partly as a result of this the numbers continuing into the sixth form from Year 11 have risen and approximately 65 per cent of the current Year 11 have expressed a wish to continue into the sixth form. The college also recruits a small number of students from outside the college into its sixth form, including a few from the local grammar schools.

### **Resources**

98 The present temporary sixth form block is in poor condition and will be demolished as part of the current building programme and the site used for a hard play area. A joint college/community initiative should result in the provision of an all weather sports pitch. Learning resources are generally good but. However, students need to be more aware of ICT provision within subject areas so that they can continue to use ICT facilities when those in the Learning Resource Centre are not available. The provision of ICT will be substantially improved with the completion of the new building. Staffing levels are good in the sixth form. Teachers are well qualified and benefit from the same very good professional development and support as in the main school.

## **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

99 In order to raise standards even further, staff and governors should:

- (1) Ensure that all teachers follow the college's policy for marking students' work so that they provide clear evaluation of its quality and guidance for how it could

be improved. There are many examples of excellent practice in the college for use as models.

(See paragraphs 26, 56, 120, 186, and 190)

- (2) Raise the quality of teaching and learning in the very few lessons where this is unsatisfactory. This will involve ensuring that work is properly matched to the students' needs and that they make enough progress during the lesson.

(See paragraphs 22, 112, and 197)

In addition to these points the college should also seek to meet the requirements for a daily act of worship.

### **Sixth form**

- (1) Improve accommodation for the sixth form so that there are better facilities for private study. Access to ICT also needs to be promoted. These issues are all being addressed through the current building programme.

(See paragraph 98)

- (2) Extend the system for recording attendance in the main school into the sixth form, so that there is an accurate record of who is on the site.

(See paragraphs 51, 66)

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	178
	Sixth form	62
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		240

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
<b>Years 7 – 11</b>							
Number	14	46	55	55	8	0	0
Percentage	8	26	31	31	4	0	0
<b>Sixth form</b>							
Number	7	21	26	7	1	0	0
Percentage	11	34	42	11	2	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for the sixth form as each lesson represents more than one percentage point.

### Information about the school's pupils

<b>Pupils on the school's roll</b>	Y7– Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1454	230
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	45	1

<b>Special educational needs</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	28	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	282	1

<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	32

<b>Pupil mobility in the last school year</b>	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	20
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	31

## Attendance

### Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.1
National comparative data	7.8

### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.5
National comparative data	1.2

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

## Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 (Year 9)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	143	150	293

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	85	104	87
	Girls	117	121	102
	Total	202	225	189
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	69 (69)	77 (73)	65 (65)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	30 (31)	55 (43)	22 (23)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	81	106	96
	Girls	128	121	107
	Total	209	227	203
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	74 (61)	78 (74)	68 (59)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	27 (22)	56 (44)	29 (17)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	140	117	257

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	67	121	129
	Girls	73	113	115
	Total	140	235	245
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	54.4 (51.2)	91.4 (91.0)	95.3 (96.0)
	National	50 (48)	91 (91)	96.0 (96.0)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	38.2 (37.3)
	National	39.8 (39.0)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	20	88.2
	National		N/a

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	27	54	81
	Average point score per candidate	11.4 (12.4)	14.9 (10.3)	13.8 (11.2)
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9 (17.1)	18 (18)	17.5 (17.6)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	23	46	69	5	12	17
	Average point score per candidate	11.2	13.6	12.8	10.2	15	13.6
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

*Figures in brackets refer to 2000.*

Figures in the table are based on results for 2001, the latest year for which there are national comparisons.

### ***Ethnic background of pupils***

### ***Exclusions in the last school year***

<b>Categories used in the Annual School Census</b>	<b>No of pupils on roll</b>	<b>Number of fixed period exclusions</b>	<b>Number of permanent exclusions</b>
White – British	1522	71	3
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	37	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	0	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	58	2	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	14	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	7	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	12	0	0
Black or Black British – African	2	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	3	0	0
Chinese	4	0	0
Any other ethnic group	0	5	1
No ethnic group recorded	25	0	0

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

### ***Teachers and classes***

### ***Financial information***

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	76.3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	22

#### **Education support staff: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of education support staff	11
Total aggregate hours worked per week	287

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	81.3
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13**

Key Stage 3	28.8
Key Stage 4	26.0

Financial year	2001/2
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	£
Total income	4,465,212
Total expenditure	4,397,098
Expenditure per pupil	2611
Balance brought forward from previous year	144,089
Balance carried forward to next year	212,203

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

### **Recruitment of teachers**

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	32
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	46
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	9
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

## **Results of the survey of parents and carers**

### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	1542
Number of questionnaires returned	522

### **Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	28	61	8	3	1
My child is making good progress in school.	34	59	4	0	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	18	59	14	2	8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	53	22	4	2
The teaching is good.	23	68	4	1	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	27	53	15	3	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	49	44	5	2	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	52	44	2	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	24	54	18	2	2
The school is well led and managed.	39	52	3	1	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	33	57	5	1	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	25	47	13	1	14

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

### ENGLISH

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

#### Strengths

- Standards achieved in GCSE examinations are above national averages.
- Good teaching is reflected in improved standards in Year 9.
- Good assessment schemes are used to track the progress of each student.
- Very good use of ICT enhances the quality of students' learning overall.
- Good relationships between teachers and students make learning a good experience.
- The enthusiastic subject leader manages his team very well.
- Teachers are committed to successful achievements for all their students.

#### Areas for improvement

- More alternative tasks are needed to match the needs of mixed ability groups in Years 7 and 8.
- Homework does not meet the learning needs of all students.
- Some groups of students in Years 7, 8 and 9 are not achieving as well as they should particularly in their writing.
- Students' work should be marked more regularly and more consistently across all year groups.

100 Standards in 2002 Year 9 national tests were broadly average. The college maintained the sharp rise in results achieved in 2001 and a number of students did even better, gaining the highest levels, although a significant proportion of weaker students did not achieve as well as expected and girls outperformed boys by a wide margin. Students join the college with average standards or below. They come from a range of primary schools and have very mixed abilities. As a result of the good teaching they receive most students make sound progress and achieve well by the end of Year 9. However, a significant number of students in Years 7 and 8 are marking time during this transition stage and not making the progress they should. This is chiefly because there have been many staff changes over the past year which is reflected in the quality of the students' learning. However, the college has handled this well and students are poised to benefit from the stability in staffing that has been established.

101 Results in the GCSE examinations were above average showing improved achievement since the Year 9 tests and good improvement overall since the last inspection. English literature results were lower than expected despite a significant increase in the previous year. Underachieving students in Year 11 are identified through the student tracking system and learning support is provided to enhance their performance in the GCSE examinations. Some weaker students take the Certificate of Achievement in literacy in addition to their GCSE in English. Students with special educational needs, including those with physical disabilities, benefit from the special care they receive and make good progress overall. Able, gifted and talented students progress well because they are challenged by the study of stimulating texts and as a result many gained the top grades in the 2002 GCSE examinations. Since the last inspection there has been good improvement from most groups of students throughout the school.

102 By Year 9, most students answer well in class and take a lively part in group discussion although there was little evidence of more formal speaking presentations in the

lessons seen. Higher attaining students read fluently, bringing the text to life for the listener. Lower attaining students read accurately although not as expressively but all are keen to try. Students' learning is well supported through the paired reading schemes by students in Years 12 and by administrative staff who regularly read with underachieving students. Standards of writing are mostly good because students work productively and know how to change their style to suit their readers. For example, Year 9 students writing as newspaper journalists reported that 'Dumb detectives devour the evidence' in an amusing account of a murder mystery which captured the style of the tabloid press. All students entering the annual poetry writing competition are rewarded by having their poems printed in a book celebrating their creativity. The poems promote reading for pleasure by reminding students that 'books are the key to a world of dreams'. One enthusiast presented his poem in the shape of a football boot; written on the studs was the philosophical comment that "every game has its winners and losers". Students in Year 11 take part confidently in discussions on a range of topics, listening attentively to the opinions of others and expressing their own points of view. Year 10 students develop reading and writing skills by analysing the techniques used by poets to convey meaning through the economical use of words to excite the imagination. By Year 11, students' own writing is often adventurous with a good choice of vocabulary which arouses the readers curiosity and compels the reader to finish the story, for example in the spine-chilling tale of *The Assassin*.

103 Teaching is good overall and never less than satisfactory with several very good and excellent lessons observed. Most teachers plan their lessons to excite students and capture their interest. For example, students in Year 7 were enthralled by the hypnotic powers of the 'demon headmaster' and read the text expressively, assuming a range of voices to suggest the different characters in the play. Students joined enthusiastically in the game of finding suitable adjectives and verbs to enliven their own writing on a similar theme. Many students in Year 8 respond well in lessons and enjoy the learning tasks set; for example, students in a Year 8 class developed their knowledge of characters and situation by writing about the 'sneaker incident' from the viewpoint of Stanley, the hero of their story, *Holes*. However students come from a range of primary schools and in some classes students have not yet mastered the skills of sentence construction, or the care needed with spelling, punctuation and grammar. In these groups, work should be matched more closely to students' needs because they do not value their writing sufficiently, nor strive to make it better. Learning improves in Year 9 when students are grouped according to their learning needs. For example, Year 9 students identified key features from early scenes in *Macbeth* as they explored language implying sinister threat and looming evil. Excellent interaction between teacher and students fired their enthusiasm to learn more about the play and the motivations of the characters, encouraging them to find suitable quotations to support their written comments on the text. Students in Years 10 and 11 learn well in response to skilled teaching closely matched to GCSE examinations. They structure their writing carefully, understanding that language is a powerful tool they can use to express their thoughts and emotions.

104 All teachers are well supported by a framework of successful strategies devised to ensure that students learn well. Teachers manage their lively classes competently and establish good relationships which makes learning an exciting experience for their students, although there are a few classes where the tasks set are not varied enough to meet the students' needs, which limits their learning. Teachers share their good subject knowledge enthusiastically and older students value their skilful guidance, endeavouring to live up to their teachers' high expectations for their attainment.

105 Excellent assessment systems are used to track students' progress effectively and monitor their performance, although the quality of day-to-day marking varies and in some classes it is not sufficiently regular or rigorous. In Years 9, 10 and 11, ICT skills are used profitably, especially for students' personal writing where the presentation is outstanding.

The English department is well managed by the subject leader who has won the loyal support of a dedicated team of teachers committed to successful achievements for all their students. Problems caused by frequent staff turnover and sudden changes of teacher have been handled skilfully and the department is poised for further success in 2003.

### **Literacy across the college**

106 A strength of the school is the very confident speaking skills that students develop through the encouragement they receive from their teachers who provide opportunities for students to exchange their ideas and opinions by taking part in class discussions. Opportunities to contribute to the college council and annual 'Youth Speaks' competitions enhance students' oral skills. This fluency equips students well for life in the wider world outside school. Overall, students read accurately deducing the meaning from the texts studied and higher attaining students read with increasing fluency. Workshops conducted by children's authors and by poets are held annually, which encourages students to read for pleasure and write for enjoyment. The literacy co-ordinator shares his teaching strategies with teachers in other subjects and as a result students are encouraged to record their work coherently using relevant terminology in their non-fiction writing. All subject areas display lists of key words and students use specific vocabulary with increasing confidence. However, inspectors observed that writing skills were weak in some subjects and it is in this area that improvement is needed.

### **Drama**

107 Drama was sampled briefly: two lessons were observed and students' improvised performances were shared. No firm judgement can be made but this evidence seems to suggest that students' achievements in drama are satisfactory or better overall. Teachers have good knowledge of their subject and are skilled performers, able to guide their students through a range of techniques while allowing them freedom to explore their own ideas. In the Year 9 lessons seen, learning was satisfactory, although practical work was limited because students were not sufficiently aware of time, space and ways to build dramatic tension between characters in the given situation. However, by Year 10 these skills were developed in the polished improvisation observed which was prepared for GCSE coursework. Students used sticks and dustbins as effective props for a physical enactment of a real trauma, linking reality and imagination skilfully by exploring the embarrassment of wearing a dental brace. Students enjoy their lessons and many take part in the extra-curricular activities provided; consequently drama makes a good contribution to students' personal development overall.

## **MATHEMATICS**

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

#### Strengths

- The improvement in standards, especially in the performance of girls, since the last inspection.
- The opportunities for many students to gain a GCSE in statistics, as well as in mathematics.
- The procedures for testing and assessment.
- The evaluation of the department's performance.

#### Areas for improvement

- The attainment of the most able students in Year 11.
- The use of a variety of teaching styles to fully involve all students in their learning.
- The consistent application of the National Numeracy Strategy.
- To ensure that all students know how they are doing.

108 Attainment on entry to the college in mathematics is below average. Standards of attainment of students at the age of 14 are above the national average. National Curriculum test results at the end of Year 9 are above the average of all schools nationally, and well above similar schools. In the 2002 National Curriculum tests, students of all attainments performed well. Girls performed better than boys. Students' performance in mathematics is better than the other two core subjects of English and science. Students, including those with special educational needs, make very good progress between the ages of 11 and 14.

109 Standards of attainment at the age of 16 are slightly above the national average. Students, including those with special educational needs, make good progress between the ages of 14 and 16. GCSE results have risen over recent years. In 2002 the proportion gaining A\*-C grades was above the national average. The percentage gaining the highest grades of A\* and A was below the national average. Students' performance in GCSE mathematics in 2002 was broadly the same as English, and better than science. Girls perform better than boys.

110 Standards of work seen in classes and in the work scrutiny are in line with expected levels throughout the main college. They reflect the way students are grouped into sets by prior attainment. In Year 7, students know the four operations and the inverse operations, and find the volume of cuboids. In Year 8 they find the circumference of a circle, firstly making an estimate, and understand factors, square numbers and negative numbers. In Year 9 the students solve practical problems using Pythagoras' Theorem, and find the volume of cylinders. In Year 10 students understand place value and the order of decimals, and the higher attaining students construct frequency tables from frequency graphs, finding the mean and modal group. In Year 11 students use trigonometry to solve problems involving right-angled triangles, and describe simple transformations.

111 Teaching and learning throughout the main college are good. Groups are formed on the basis of prior attainment comprising students of similar abilities. This arrangement works when teachers plan well for the different abilities. It is less successful where teachers set work that is either too hard for the lower attaining students or too easy for the higher attaining students. In most lessons, teachers set out clear objectives, recap and build on the work that has gone before. In one Year 9 lesson on how to multiply and divide numbers by 10 and 100, the teacher changed his approach when he realised that some students did not really understand the work done before. Some lessons begin well, with effective starter activities involving mental problems. Students in a Year 8 lesson enjoyed the 'tables bingo', while those in a Year 11 lesson enjoyed using their calculators. In a Year 7 lesson on shape, space and measure, the teacher made good use of resources (multi-links) requiring students to find the

volume of cuboids. Some teachers also end lessons with brief but helpful consolidation. Teachers often make effective use of questions that require students to think through their answers and show a secure level of understanding of the topic being covered. In a Year 9 lesson students enjoyed responding to questions about Pythagoras, and working through real-life problems.

112 Students' learning is less successful when lessons contain a limited range of learning approaches; there is little paired or group work. Opportunities are also missed to organise the classrooms to enable a variety of activities.

113 Teachers regularly set appropriate homework, which is properly marked, as is the work done in class. Good records are kept of students' progress, and academic performance of students is monitored. Testing is regular and rigorous, and is used to place students in the appropriate group. Some reports to parents are unhelpful because neither the tutor nor the teacher advise appropriately where a student's performance has worsened. There is a need to refine targets set so they are clearly understood by students and linked to National Curriculum levels and/or GCSE grade requirements; some students are not sure how they are doing.

114 The attitudes and behaviour of students are very good. Often the response of the higher attaining students is very good. Most students are well motivated and respond to the work set. Some boys and girls in the lower sets show less interest when teachers do not provide work that is varied and stimulating. The non-attendance of some students is inhibiting their progress. Too many students arrive late to lessons. Generally, students are too dependent on the teachers.

115 The college is using its resources well to ensure that the higher attaining students in Year 10 benefit from being taught in a relatively small group. Students with special educational needs are well supported, although some are taught in a classroom that is too small for its purpose. Many students benefit from entry to the GCSE in statistics, in addition to mathematics. The college's policy of entering as many students as possible for the GCSE is commendable.

116 The department is well led. The subject leader, ably supported by his line manager, works hard to support and monitor the work of teachers. Progress in developing mathematics since the previous inspection has been good. Standards have risen at the age of 16, especially for girls. Teaching and learning continue to be good overall. Procedures for monitoring have been strengthened, as has the documentation to support teaching and learning, including the implementation of effective assessment arrangements.

### **Numeracy across the college**

117 The strategies for teaching numeracy skills are good. In science, Year 9 students make calculations of pressure using the appropriate units. Year 10 students calculate velocity and acceleration. Students in Year 13 use spreadsheets. In history, students interpret graphs about the relative production of aircraft in England and Germany during the 1930s, and make valid deductions. In geography, students use histograms to analyse data collected in their fieldwork. In design and technology, students use block graphs and pie charts for the analysis of data collected, and draw to scale. In business studies, students use data in break-even analysis, and calculate profit margins.

## **SCIENCE**

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

Strengths

- Good teaching.
- Laboratory accommodation and resources.

Areas for improvement

- ICT not embedded into curriculum
- Standards at the end of Year 9 and Year 11.

118 During the past three years the standards reached by the end of Year 9 are below the national average and below the national average when compared to prior attainment. Standards are similar to that reached by other secondary modern schools, but below that being achieved by all similar schools. Girls do better than boys and their attainment is slightly lower in science than in English and mathematics. The improvement to attainment in science in the past three years has been similar to that nationally. At the end of Year 11, students have been entered for either double award or single award science, but from 2003 all students will enter the double award. In the past three years the standards reached in the double and single award have been above the national average. When compared with other subjects at the school students taking the double award obtain similar results but those taking the single subject do less well. Girls perform better than boys both in both awards. Those not entered or receiving lower grades are mainly boys.

119 The standards of work seen during the inspection were higher than those suggested by national testing. This is because several strategies are now in place to improve the subject including increased teaching time in Years 7 to 9, the phasing out of the single award groups, a new management structure and the introduction of teaching and learning approaches from the national strategy. These are all contributing to providing a greater challenge to students, which was an issue in the last inspection. Students work conscientiously and are keen to do well. Their progress is monitored regularly through end of topic tests and some students change groups. All students now have their own copy of a commercially produced study guide and this is being used effectively in class and for homework. The curriculum (being revised at the time of the inspection to implement the national strategy and changes to the double award course) has a strong practical focus and students benefit by undertaking a broad range of experimental work which enhances their understanding of scientific principles. All students gain experience in planning and conducting their own investigations and this is helping them to develop enquiring minds. Students with special learning needs do well. Students are developing skills in literacy in science through vocabulary and spelling exercises, but there is scope for a wider use of writing styles in exercise books. Many experiments involve taking measurements and data analysis which allow students to develop numeracy skills. Most students are good at graph plotting and drawing conclusions from data. The use of ICT to aid learning needs strengthening, particularly in data capture, analysis and graphical display.

120 The overall quality of teaching is good. All lessons were at least satisfactory and three out of four were either good or very good. The most effective teaching was characterised by a high level of teacher questioning and challenge that extended thinking, for example in a lesson on breaking chemical bonds. Teaching was also well matched to the needs of student groupings, as seen in a lower group lesson about the effect of acid rain on germination. In nearly all lessons the intended learning outcomes were achieved and teachers are skilled in making these clear to students both at the beginning and at the end of lessons. Where support staff are present in laboratories they are well briefed, and are successful in helping all students to be engaged in the lesson. Students benefit by being required to formulate their own ideas and to make hypotheses – as seen in lessons on electrical resistance and plate

tectonics. In nearly all lessons the relationships between teachers and students were very good and considerable attention was given to the regular monitoring of progress with carefully formulated written comments in exercise books. However, some marking did not give enough emphasis on how to improve presentation skills, handwriting or making students aware of targets. Students' learning in some lessons would have been enhanced by using a wider range of visual resource material, for example in an earth science lesson. Also, some lessons could have made more of the everyday applications of science or applications in industry, for example in a lesson on transition metals. More effective use could be made of exercise books – to identify and make links between topics covered in different modules and so help to reinforce the big ideas in science and to reflect the changed emphasis in national testing. The learning in some of the higher groups in Year 11 was being restricted slightly where teachers were not within their main specialism.

121 The response of students to learning opportunities is good. They are very responsible in laboratories, work well in groups – which are often mixed gender – and are willing to become involved in debate and discussion. They generally concentrate for the full duration of lessons, are proud of their work and can talk confidently about it. They are always well prepared for lessons and generally behave well.

122 The subject has benefited by a recent, extensive review and the actions to be taken to improve are sound and are being addressed and supported by the school. The leadership and management of the subject are now good, following a period of instability in staffing. Staff now feel optimistic about the changes that are being made and are committed to taking the subject forward. Some of these changes are as a result of national initiatives and all of them will require a heavy investment in staff development. Accommodation for science is good, and most laboratories have been recently refurbished. Three are situated away from the others, making it difficult to move equipment. There is a small ICT area in one laboratory that was underused at the time of the inspection because of software problems. There are three technicians, who provide excellent support, allowing staff to include practical work in most lessons. The large number of lessons and quick turnaround of classes presents a heavy workload for technical staff who provide a good level of support.

123 To improve further the subject should extend links with industry and professional institutions, encourage the development of more science clubs and project work, and become involved in national projects. The current good commitment to continuing professional development needs to be continued and involve all staff, including technicians and support teachers.

## **ART AND DESIGN**

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

#### Strengths

- Leadership and management are very good and a positive working environment has been created in the department.
- Teachers possess very good subject knowledge.
- Clear objectives are set for students during lessons.
- Most students have a good attitude and respond well to tasks that are set by their teachers.

#### Areas for improvement

- Assessing and marking of students' work at the end of Year 9.
- The impact of large class sizes on the standard of students' work.
- The use of modern technology, photography and ICT, during lessons.

124 When students enter the school at the start of Year 7, their level of attainment in art and design is below the national average for students of their age. Teacher assessments for Year 9 students in 2002 indicated that students were working well above the national average. These were overly generous and current work seen during the inspection shows that students in Year 9 are producing work of a standard that is broadly in line with national expectations. Achievement from the start of Year 7 through to the end of Year 9 is good. In the GCSE art and design examination in 2001 the number of students who achieved the highest A\*-C grades was well above the national average. Boys' attainment was well above girls' attainment in 2001 but well below in the 2002, though overall still well above the national average. This reversed the downward trend of the previous three years. Overall attainment was well above average however, and the improved results in 2002 show a reversal in the downward trend of the previous three years. These students performed much better in the art and design examination than in all other school subjects that they took that year. Current attainment in Year 11 is much higher than national expectations, and achievement is very good throughout Years 10 and 11.

125 Year 7 students work well to improve the quality of their art and craft work. A significant minority found it difficult to settle down at the start of lessons but most applied themselves readily to the tasks that had been set by their teachers. They are making satisfactory progress and are producing work of a standard that is in line with the national average. Year 8 students continue to make satisfactory progress and, in one lesson seen, worked with reasonable concentration to acquire new skills in block printing. However, a significant minority had difficulty in gaining control over this process. By the time students reach Year 9, most have the capacity to work with reasonable concentration to acquire new knowledge and develop new technical skills. In one lesson seen they were working with three-dimensional materials to produce masks based upon drawn studies of their own faces. There was, however, little evidence of any independent thinking on their part. The majority are producing work of a standard that is broadly in line with national expectations. It was very apparent that the large size of many of these classes, ranging from 29 to 32 students, did have an impact on the overall standard of work produced and on students' behaviour and attitudes. Achievement from the start of Year 7 through to the end of Year 9 is good.

126 Students in Year 10 are producing work of a standard that is above the national average. They concentrate well and they are now capable of carrying out in-depth research into the set tasks and developing these ideas over much longer periods of time. Some are beginning to work with real independence to acquire new knowledge and develop appropriate technical skills that will enable them to communicate their ideas and express their feelings through art and craft work. Studies in the visual diaries show that they are beginning to produce highly personal concepts and ideas which are to be communicated in a visual form.

They conduct research into the work of artists such as Picasso and use this experience to inform their own art work in both two and three dimensions. They also make very good use of written text to clarify their intentions for their audience. Year 11 students are producing work of a standard that is well above national expectations. By this stage they are beginning to demonstrate very good control over a range of media and materials and are developing the confidence to work from their own ideas, concepts, attitudes, values and beliefs. They work with concentrated application and most demonstrate the capacity for thinking and learning for themselves. There is ample evidence of independence of thought and action in their visual diaries where they have collected a solid body of research material for their GCSE examination. The standard of work produced by these students is well above national expectations and achievement throughout Years 10 and 11 is very good.

127 Students with special educational needs are very well integrated into groups and they are expected to work to the best of their ability. They are very well supported, work well and make good progress.

128 Teaching ranges from satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 to very good in Years 10 and 11 and is good overall. Teachers come to lessons very well prepared and organisation is usually very good. In those lessons that are just satisfactory this is generally because of a mismatch between students' abilities and the nature of the tasks that they have been set. There is also the additional factor of difficulty in controlling groups that are too large for the available studio space. Teachers possess good subject knowledge and are well qualified to teach basic skills across a wide range of art, craft and design specialisms. Much greater use could be made of modern technology in the form of film strips, video, television, CD-ROMs and even DVDs when introducing lessons, to gain students' interest and improve motivation. Teachers have very high expectations of the students and relationships are very good. Students obviously feel that they are working in a very supportive environment.

129 Leadership and management are very good. There is a new subject leader and already he is working to create new assessing and recording systems in collaboration with other members of his team. This is particularly important in relation to improving the assessment of students' work at the end of Year 9, which was overly generous in 2002. At present, it is proving difficult to make effective use of available objective data, as they have been derived mainly from subject areas other than art, craft and design. He has managed to create a very good working environment in the short time that he has been in the school. He has been ably assisted in this by a member of the leadership team who teaches in his department.

130 Accommodation is very good. There are four large art studios, but the layout of one creates some difficulties for teachers, due to a change of floor level, which makes class management difficult, particularly with groups that are too large for the available space. Storage space is adequate, but there are problems regarding access and security in respect of the resource room due to the location of the cleaning cupboard. There are also difficulties in storing large pieces of three-dimensional work.

131 Learning resources are very good overall, and students have access to a wide range of traditional art, craft and design materials. However, they have little access to modern technology in the art studios and it is important that they be given every opportunity to develop ideas and concepts through the production and manipulation of images using photography, computers, digital cameras, scanners and printers.

132 Improvement since the last inspection is very good and there was evidence during the inspection to show that the overall standard of students' work continues to improve.

## CITIZENSHIP

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

### Strengths

- Students use of a range of activities which encourage participation in lessons, where they develop skills that can be employed outside lessons.
- A teaching strength is the sensitivity displayed, universally by staff, when discussing difficult or controversial issues.
- The college is very effective at providing a setting for active citizenship.

### Area for improvement

- Citizenship has not yet become fully embedded in the curriculum. All subjects are not yet making a full contribution to the provision for citizenship.

133 By the end of Year 9, students' attainment is of average standard. Higher attaining students have a broad knowledge and understanding of the topical events they study, and show awareness of the rights, responsibilities and duties of citizens. Many contribute to discussions and debate. For example, in discussions and lessons about global issues, students have opportunities to discuss peacekeeping around the world in personal social and health education lessons. Similarly, lower attaining students explore, discuss and debate topical issues of significance and interest that are relevant to their lives. For example in history, students consider the suffrage movement whilst preparing for class elections for representatives to the college council.

134 In Years 10 and 11, students' attainment is in line with national averages. They have a good knowledge of the topical events they study. They are particularly aware of the law concerning race and gender bias. In discussion, they demonstrate a maturity of understanding, based on their own experiences. For example, Year 11 students, in their studies of discrimination law, discuss issues with a poignancy that leads to strong debate.

135 Teaching is good overall, and some lessons are very good. The best lessons and tutorials are characterised by good planning and clear aims which are clearly explained and understood by the students. In such lessons, the citizenship elements sometimes have specific references made to them. A teaching strength is the sensitivity displayed, universally by staff, when discussing sensitive or controversial issues.

136 The college has a separate policy for citizenship, which allows for the teaching of citizenship to be subsumed into other areas of the curriculum, such as personal social and health education and religious education. It is in these lessons, and in tutorials, where the main elements of the citizenship programme are offered. The schemes of work of National Curriculum subjects include citizenship and details of how their provision dovetails into and contributes to the citizenship programme are clearly outlined in a map of provision. Citizenship is offered as part of other programmes in all years in the college including Years 12 and 13. In Years 7 to 11, citizenship is promoted in tutorial periods, assemblies, personal social and health education and in religious education. Such provision is augmented by provision in some but not all subjects of the National Curriculum.

137 The college is very effective in providing a setting for active citizenship in the community of the college. For example, in some lessons, there is a high preponderance for formal debate and informal discussion, in which listening to other people's views and the formal challenging of them lead to students acquiring skills which they use later in practical situations, such as participation in the college council.

## DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

### Strengths

- Standards at the end of Year 9 and Year 11.
- Very good quality teaching and learning.
- Very good leadership and management.
- Use of assessment to raise standards in all year groups.

### Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT across all material areas.
- The achievement of lower attaining students in Years 7 and 8.

138 The standard of work seen in Years 7 to 9 is above the national average. Formal teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 indicate that standards were well above average in 2002, building further on above average standards in 2001. Attainment by boys was below that of girls. Boys achieve less well than girls by the end of Year 9 because they find difficulty in sustaining the same quality and interest in the work. Boys need to experience a more practical approach to design work and get into making at a much earlier stage. Girls achieve more highly than boys because they complete work more accurately and present it well. Increased use of ICT will also help motivate boys who have equally good ideas but are less skilled at presenting them well. Students have good skills in ICT and they need to be exploited more fully in all material areas.

139 GCSE results were above the national average for all schools. The proportion of students gaining an A\*-C grade was above average and those of girls well above average. Boys' A\*-C grades were in line with the national average.

140 The proportion of students gaining an A\*-G grade was just below the national average, indicating some underachievement by lower attaining students. If the overall GCSE results in 2002 are compared to the performance that could have been predicted from the test results at the end of Year 9 in 2000, these results are good. Hence students' achievement is good. Boys' results were well below those of girls because some boys find difficulty in managing their major project coursework and in meeting deadlines for assessment. The work of boys needs to be more rigorously managed and be frequently assessed, if the gap between boys and girls is to be bridged. Results in 2002 were better than in 2001. The trend in results over the last three years is upward because teachers have clear targets and a good understanding of the potential abilities of students.

141 By Year 9, students can work through the design process in a systematic way. They have developed good graphic skills and are becoming more sophisticated at knowing how to develop a chosen design idea. Practical skills are good in resistant materials, textiles and food technology. In some lower groups in Years 8 and 9, students find difficulty in following the design process through and their practical skills are weak. Work lacks precision and the quality of finish needs to be improved. These students do not have role models to be able to gauge the quality of their work and thus raise standards. By Year 11, most students can complete projects to high standard and some of the work of the most able is exceptional. These students have developed good research and analytical skills, and respond well to some very good teaching. Examples of high quality work could be found in food technology, textiles and resistant materials. This work could be enhanced further with increased use of

ICT. Some weaker students cannot apply themselves well enough to complete work for GCSE assessment and are not entered for the examinations. A more appropriate course needs to be developed to cater for the different needs of these students.

142 Students with special educational needs make good progress when they are part of a more able group. In these situations they are well supported by the teachers and the very good learning support assistants, and learn effectively. Those students with special educational needs who are in the lowest sets do not do themselves justice and fail to reach their potential.

143 Attitudes, values and personal development are very good for almost all students. They show a very good level of interest in the work, support and help one another and relate well to the teachers. The standard of behaviour is very good. However, in some lower ability groups in both younger and older age groups, students display immature behaviour and sometime have only limited interest in their work.

144 The quality of teaching is very good in all three material areas. There are very good specialist teachers in food, textiles and resistant materials. Over three quarters of lessons were good or better and half of these were very good. Analysis of students' work indicates that very good teaching is sustained over the year. There was one unsatisfactory lesson in a Year 11 lower ability group. All teachers prepare their lessons well, but need to focus more carefully on what students are to learn, through the detailed tasks set for each lesson. Lesson planning also includes targeting the key skills of literacy, numeracy and citizenship. Aspects of these skills are present in many lessons but teachers rarely make overt reference to them at key points in the lessons. The quality of teaching is enhanced by the very good preparation and support given by the technician in food and textiles.

145 In Year 9, a very good food technology lesson involved students working in pairs to create biscuits with an Easter gift appeal. Students adapted the basic recipes well and decorated the finished products with precision and imagination. The teacher helped students to complete a thorough evaluation, extending earlier work on sensory analysis. The standard achieved by boys benefited from working with girls, and a student with special educational needs made very good progress. In contrast, in a satisfactory Year 8 food group, the finished products lacked quality because students' attention had not been drawn to potential difficulties soon enough.

146 In Year 11, a very good textiles lesson involved students in developing a production plan, as part of their coursework project folder. The teacher skilfully built up the necessary components for a good plan from students' answers to questions. She handled the debate about why such plans are necessary with skill, placing it in the context of industrial practices. Students found visualising the sequencing of their own plans a challenge, but with good support from the teacher almost all had produced a good plan by the end of the lesson. In contrast, in a satisfactory Year 10 textile group, insufficient progress was made by the group as a whole, because too much of the teacher's attention was drawn to a small group of uncooperative students.

147 Leadership and management are very good. The curriculum is well planned and reviewed regularly, but greater emphasis needs to be placed on using ICT and systems and control resources, as an entitlement for all students as they move through the college. The development plan is well focused and effectively supports the targets set for a Technology College. Good policies are in place and consistently implemented by all staff. The quality of teachers' assessment practices and the marking of students' work are very good. All students are clear about the level of their work in Years 7 to 9, and of potential GCSE grades for work in Years 10 and 11. Students are given clear information about how to improve and

are involved in setting their own targets. Detailed analysis of examination results is undertaken for the subject as a whole and for groups taught by individual teachers. More detailed monitoring of teaching and learning is required to assess the overall effectiveness of groups set by ability and the impact these organisational arrangements have on the progress of all students. It would also help identify particular professional development needs, when good teachers are working outside their immediate area of expertise. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

## GEOGRAPHY

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

### Strengths

- Students make good progress.
- Teachers' planning is excellent and teachers have very high expectations of students' work and behaviour.
- Leadership and management are very effective.
- Procedures for assessment, including marking, are very good.

### Area for improvement

- The overall standards achieved by boys in Years 7 to 9.

148 Students' overall level of attainment by the end of Year 9 is in line with the national expectation. When teachers assessed students' work in 2002 at the end of Year 9, their results suggested that the overall standard was average. Girls achieve significantly higher standards than boys, as they complete work more thoroughly and in greater depth, and concentrate better. Teachers have implemented appropriate strategies to overcome these differences. During the inspection the overall standard of work seen was average.

149 By the end of Year 9, students have an average knowledge of the main features of landscapes, such as rivers, and how people make use of them. In Year 8, for example, students clearly understood the reasons for building the Aswan Dam in Egypt. In one lesson they successfully used their knowledge to consider the social, economic and environmental consequences of the dam, and the views of the people living nearby. Students have an average knowledge of what a selected number of places are like. One group in Year 9, for instance, accurately described the landscape of Italy, and how this affects where the people of the country live.

150 The proportion of students gaining grades A\*-C in the GCSE examination in 2002 was slightly above the national average and similar to those achieved in 2001. The proportion who gained the highest A\* or A grades was well below the national average. Boys and girls achieved similar standards. Teachers analyse the examination results very thoroughly. The subject has implemented clear strategies to improve standards including a focus on examination techniques, revision, and coursework. During the inspection the overall standard of work seen was average.

151 By the end of Year 11, students have a good understanding of the links between the actions of people and their environment, for instance, in studies of acid rain. They use geographical models successfully to describe and explain the land use in cities. In Year 10 students clearly understand the reasons for variations in the growth of population in different parts of the world and the issues involved in attempting to control its growth. One group of students, for instance, knowledgeably discussed the links between the levels of literacy and population growth in India. Students in Year 11 have a good knowledge of how energy

sources in the United Kingdom have changed in the last 40 years and the consequences of these changes. The majority of students have an average knowledge of examples to illustrate the topics they study.

152 Students have average geographical skills by Year 11. They read maps and use atlases successfully but their knowledge of where places are is weak. They collect information efficiently from a wide range of resource materials such as maps, pictures and newspaper articles. The majority of students have an above average knowledge of geographical terms which higher attaining students use in their written work. They have a better than average understanding of the methods of geographical enquiry, in collecting and analysing data, drawing conclusions and evaluating the effectiveness of the methods used. Written work is completed carefully, but a minority of boys in Years 7 to 9 do not include sufficient detail. Students generally listen carefully and have good skills in numeracy, so they draw and analyse graphs correctly.

153 The quality of teaching is very good and some is outstanding. Teachers quickly establish a very purposeful working atmosphere because lessons are well prepared and start promptly. They begin with a brisk and lively 'starter' activity that quickly gains students' attention and interest. Lesson planning is excellent. A variety of lively and well-structured activities are provided which fully involve all students in paired, group or individual work and develop and reinforce their knowledge and understanding. The resources used are carefully selected and lessons proceed at a rapid pace. As a result students work hard, gain knowledge and understanding quickly, listen attentively, complete work accurately and make good progress.

154 In one lesson in Year 10, for instance, students studied measures to slow population growth in China. Following a rapid review of previous work, they briskly considered the lesson's objectives, attentively watched a well-chosen video clip and discussed the issues it raised as a class. They then quickly read a relevant newspaper article underlining the key points and used them to write a paragraph describing the effects of the policies it described in both urban and rural areas. They then considered the views of different groups of Chinese people before thoughtfully considering their own viewpoint in groups. Finally they reviewed the lesson's objectives to assess the very good progress they had made.

155 Teachers manage students very skilfully, with the result that they work hard, behave very well and maintain their concentration throughout. A strength of the teaching is that teachers expect the highest standards of work and behaviour from the students, who respond by working diligently to achieve the high standards set by their teachers. Lessons end with a review to assess the progress made but often these are sometimes not rigorous enough. When students are asked to work in groups or pairs they co-operate with each other very effectively because the work is well organised, purposeful and interesting.

156 Teachers make a very good contribution to the development of students' skills in literacy. In one class in Year 8 the teacher ensured students were familiar with the key words they were to use in the lesson, they read and highlighted points from a newspaper article, and discussed how to structure and write paragraphs using the key words they had learnt. Books are marked up to date with positive comments on what students have done wrong and how they can improve. During the inspection, worthwhile and relevant homework was set regularly.

157 The very good quality of leadership gives the subject a very clear sense of direction and purpose. Management is very effective. There are well-considered plans for the future and strategies to raise standards based on the close monitoring of teaching and a comprehensive review of the performance of the subject. Schemes of work are well written

and fully meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. The thorough system of assessment very effectively supports the work of individual students, and as a result they know precisely what progress they are making and what they need to do to improve.

158 Staffing is excellent as four well-qualified specialist staff teach the subject. Subject rooms are close together and are well equipped but two of them are too small for teachers to develop a full range of teaching methods. Well-presented displays, mostly of students' work, enhance the environment. The subject has made significant improvements since the time of the previous inspection and staff have the capacity and commitment to raise standards still further.

## HISTORY

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

### Strengths

- The quality of teaching overall is very good.
- Students have very positive attitudes.
- Students make very good progress in Years 10 and 11.

### Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient consistency in the marking system in Years 7 to 9.
- The comments on students' work in Years 7 to 9 do not always tell students clearly how they can improve.

159 By the end of Year 9 students' attainment overall is broadly in line with that expected nationally. In 2001 and 2002 teachers assessed their students' work at the end of Year 9 as in line with the national average. More girls than boys reach above average standards. The overall standard of work seen during the inspection was average. Only a small proportion, however, reach standards that are well above average. Most students begin Year 7 a little below average and as a result of very effective teaching most make good progress in Years 7 to 9. Many of the higher attainers make very good progress because the work set is appropriately demanding. In a very small proportion of lessons the progress is not as good as it should be because the students are unclear about what they are being asked to do. Students with special educational needs make good progress, because teachers use activities in which the students can participate and from which they can learn.

160 The proportion of students gaining grades A\*-C in the GCSE examinations was above the national average in 2002. The results have steadily improved over the past four years from broadly average to above average. The proportion who gained an A or A\* grade in 2002 was, however, below average. These standards are similar to those reported at the previous inspection. In 2002 the boys' attainment was significantly above the boys' national average, whereas that of the girls was in line with the girls' average. The overall standard of work seen during the inspection was in line with that expected nationally. A small proportion of students have the potential to gain the highest grades. Most students make very good progress as they move through Years 10 and 11 because they are very well taught and because they have a very positive attitude to their work

161 Students in Years 7 to 9 have good knowledge and understanding about the past. They understand and explain well the causes of past events. In their work on how countries tried to avoid war in the 1930s the high attainers demonstrated good understanding of the possible diplomatic moves countries might have made. Students explain change successfully. Students in Year 8, for example, identified and explained the changes to a town

between 1750 and 1900. Most use historical sources well for information and make valid deductions from them. The highest attainers competently evaluate the reliability of sources. The written work produced by the high attainers is of above average quality; many write in a mature style.

162 Most students taking GCSE have good knowledge and understanding of the topics they are studying. Students in a Year 11 group, for instance, recalled well their work on the discovery of penicillin. In their work on Fleming they successfully evaluated the relative importance of an individual's contribution to historical change. The high attaining students made good links between the many factors that led to the mass production of penicillin. In their coursework on Jack the Ripper and on the death of John F. Kennedy, the high attainers write well at length, and use sources successfully to build up a point of view, which they then argue well. The work from lower attainers is usually more narrative and descriptive rather than analytical, and so does not reach the top grades.

163 The quality of teaching is very good overall, and is often excellent. In a very small proportion of lessons in Years 7 to 9 it is unsatisfactory. In the very best lessons, imaginative teaching methods, which fire the interest of the students, together with challenging tasks, a brisk pace and very good relationships, result in very good, and sometimes excellent, learning. In these lessons there is a buzz of interest and involvement among the students. Where the teaching is unsatisfactory it is because the students are unclear about what they should do; when as a result they become restless, some poor behaviour is not dealt with quickly and effectively.

164 Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which they pass on effectively to their students. Lessons are planned very well, with an appropriately wide variety of teaching and learning approaches, including group and paired work, individual work and whole-class teaching. Very effective group work helped students in Year 10 to create a commentary to a film about Hitler to show that they understood the idea of propaganda.

165 Teachers prepare students very well for their GCSE examinations. They make good use of practice questions. Students in Year 11 were asked to mark three sample answers and explain their grading. This was successful in helping them to see what makes a top grade answer.

166 Teachers make very good use of a range of good quality, college-produced resources. They make little use, however, of textbooks. As a result students do not become accustomed to using books for research and reference. The department makes good use of its recently-acquired ICT facility. Teachers make a strong contribution to the development of students' literacy through their emphasis on writing and on oral work. Teachers mark students' work regularly, but they do not always provide sufficiently detailed comments on written work to help students in Years 7 to 9 improve their work. The lack of consistency across the department in the way in which work from Years 7 to 9 is marked is a weakness.

167 Almost all students have a very positive approach to their work. The very good relationships mean that students respond well to the demands their teachers put on them. They show interest, concentrate, work hard and invariably behave very well. These are important contributory factors to their usually good progress in lessons.

168 The leadership and management of the subject are very good. An ethos of hard work and challenge for both students and staff permeates the department. The teachers work very successfully as a team and non-specialists are supported well. The performance of the department has been carefully evaluated, and teaching is monitored well. The commitment of staff has contributed to an improvement in attainment at GCSE. Although the department has

generally good quality accommodation, the classrooms are small. This makes group work with large classes difficult to organise easily. The potential of the large open space in the centre of the humanities area is not sufficiently developed.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology is **very good**.

### Strengths

- Very good leadership and management have implemented a very impressive vision so that teaching is very effective.
- Students develop the ability to take charge of their own learning.
- A very good system informs teachers and students of progress being made.
- Students develop their understanding of themselves and the world in ICT lessons.
- Very good computerised resources help students learn.

### Area for improvement

- A small number of lessons do not make best use of all the resources.

169 In 2002 the proportion of students gaining a higher grade in GCSE was below the national average. The proportion of students gaining a grade was above the national average. Students gained similar grades to those they gained in their other subjects. Girls gained higher grades than did boys. In recent years, there has been no definite trend to GCSE results. In 2002, teachers assessed the work of students at the end of Year 9 as being above the national average.

170 Standards of work seen during the inspection from students in Year 9 were at the national average. This differs from the standards recorded in 2002 because they are a different set of students. Students at this age are developing a good understanding of how to present their work to different audiences, such as when students in Year 7 write leaflets about smoking for sixth form students. They efficiently search for information from the Internet. They are not as skilled at describing their work; however, as students enter the college having achieved standards below those normally found, they make good progress during the first three years.

171 This good progress continues through Years 10 and 11. Work seen from these students was also at the national average. Students have a good understanding of how ICT can benefit a business. Higher attaining students include sophisticated features in their work. Lower attaining students present their work well through good use of different computer packages. At all ages, the standards attained by girls are higher than those attained by boys. The subject management is aware of this difference and seeking ways in which boys' standards can be raised.

172 Teaching overall is very good. More than three quarters of lessons seen were judged to be good or better, with half very good or excellent. One lesson was unsatisfactory. Because of the high quality of the teaching, students learn very well. The subject team places a very strong emphasis on developing the ability of students to take charge of their own learning. The computerised 'student log' is a very valuable support to this way of learning. This tells students every lesson how well they are doing. It records every comment made by teachers. Teachers use these records very well to monitor the progress each student makes. The subject leader uses the logs to evaluate the work of his team. Students in the first three years respond very well in lessons, encouraged by the 'Olympic Points' they can gain from their work. This was seen to very good effect when students in Year 8 burst with

enthusiasm to answer questions about types of computer graphics. In the best lessons no answer is simply wrong – an incorrect answer is yet another opportunity for explanation.

173 Independent learning is supported by a wide range of resources which students use in a most mature manner. Students learn about ICT and through ICT. So, they learn far more than just ICT in ICT lessons, but without any loss of effect. Older students complete extended essays on the social and cultural effects new technology has brought about. A very good example was an essay about paedophilia and the Internet, which showed a high level of understanding of the problems. A student in Year 7 had written a letter to her granny about how the Internet might change her life! Such activities not only develop students' skills at using computers, they also develop research skills, writing and speaking, presentation skills and the ability to form and express opinions. ICT lessons make a major contribution to students' development into responsible adults and good citizens.

174 Where learning is less effective than in the best lessons, the teacher is not yet as skilled at using the extensive range of materials to meet the needs of all the students in the group equally well. Some students in Year 8 were unable to apply a series of instructions. They were uncertain as to different ways in which an image might be presented. They quickly lost interest in this lesson because they were not sure about the purpose of what they were doing.

175 Students with special educational needs progress at the same rate as other students. This is because the wide range of resources includes ample material for them. Teachers know their needs well and ensure that work is at the correct level. For the same reason, students with special gifts and talents also achieve well. This is an improvement since the last inspection when the work did not challenge them suitably.

176 The computer rooms are open an hour before school, at break, at lunchtimes and until six o'clock every day. Students make very good use at these times, for example to add to their GCSE coursework. On some of these occasions students may use computers for recreational purposes. Teachers are available to support learning at these times.

177 The subject leader moved to the school less than two years ago. Very ably supported by his deputy, a very clear vision of how the subject should be taught has been implemented. This is the principal reason why leadership and management are very good. Developing independence is at the very heart of learning in the subject. Most students now know what they have to do, how they are going to do it and by when it has to be finished. Only now are the rewards of this emphasis being reaped as it takes time to change ways in which students work. This is the reason why standards do not yet reflect the very good learning occurring. The subject leader and his deputy have produced many of the superb resources. He has introduced the very good system for monitoring the progress made by students. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

### **ICT across the college**

178 Students enter the college with standards lower than those normally found at the age of 11. However, all students are confident to use computers. Their skills are very well developed in ICT lessons, taken by all students in Years 7 to 11.

179 Teachers have received training to help them use ICT both in their lessons and to support their work. Many teachers have been provided with a laptop computer. Good use is made of ICT in a wide range of lessons. Sixth form students of history use graphics packages when learning how images can be used for propaganda purposes by designing posters of Lenin. The use of computers in English has improved the self-image of many

students, especially boys, contributing to raising standards. In religious education, students use the Internet very well to research information on Islam. Very good use of ICT is made in the learning support base to help students with special educational needs. This is one reason these students achieve well. Computers are less widely used by students in other subjects. One example is mathematics where no use of ICT was seen in students' work during the inspection.

180 Some teachers report difficulties in being able to arrange to work in rooms with computers. Students in the sixth form also say that they have difficulty finding a computer on which to work when they do not have a timetabled lesson. Currently, the school has proportionately fewer computers than found nationally but when the new buildings are completed, there will be more rooms equipped with computers.

181 The school has adopted good practices to minimise any exposure of students to undesirable material on the Internet. Parents are involved in the implementation of this policy.

## MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

### Strengths

- Standards are rising.
- There is much good and very good teaching.
- The leadership and management of the subject is very good.
- Students' behave very well and have very good attitudes to work.

### Areas for improvement

- Standards for boys.
- The range of work provided in lessons to meet the different levels of attainment, especially higher attaining students.
- The use of marking as a means of assessment.

182 Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 indicate that attainment was below average in 2002. In the 2002 GCSE examinations, in French, results at A\*-C and average points score were in line with the national average. Results in German were well below average both in terms of grades at A\*-C and in average points score. Results in German showed a significant dip in 2002 after a steady rise since the previous inspection. Results for boys are significantly lower than those for girls, which reflects the picture nationally.

183 Inspection evidence indicates that standards are average at the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11 across the three languages taught. Standards are rising steadily. Boys still achieve less well than girls but the gap is closing especially in Years 7 and 8. There have been significant improvements in teaching and in students' attitudes and behaviour since the previous report and these account for the overall rise in standards that is now taking place. In Years 7 to 11, students achieve well and this is consistent across all levels of attainment and for the minority ethnic students in the college. Although a majority of higher attaining students go to other schools, there are still a number of higher attaining students in the college and many of these could achieve even better with carefully thought out, more challenging, work designed to meet their needs. The subject makes a good contribution to students' literacy development. Careful attention is paid to spelling and grammar in many lessons and students are encouraged to write accurately. Students work out prices for food and clothes in euros and do various surveys of students' likes and dislikes that are recorded on graphs. This

makes a contribution to numeracy development. There is good use of computers for editing and refining work, for pictorial presentations and for using computer programs. Year 9 students in Spanish, for example, produced good work where they used computers to present pictures of people with detailed descriptions of their appearance.

184 By the end of Year 9, students answer questions about such topics as buying food and drink, descriptions of their houses, descriptions of people and places to go in town. The majority of students can listen to and understand the language being taught. Very little English is usually spoken in lessons; the target language is used consistently by teachers and students in most lessons. Students answer questions in the foreign language and try hard with pronunciation. By the end of Year 9 most students can hold basic conversations with a number of exchanges. Year 9 students can talk about places to go in town for example. There is limited consistent development of speaking skills for the minority of higher attaining students to enable them to carry out longer conversations using a range of tenses and a variety of vocabulary. Students develop their reading skills through reading textbooks and authentic texts to find the answers to questions. A majority of students are confident readers and often read aloud in class. This contributes to their literacy development. In their written work, a majority can write short passages from memory. Higher attaining students use present, past and future tenses by the end of Year 9. There are examples of extended writing by higher attaining students, such as those done by Year 8 students in Spanish about their homes, but these are the exceptions and there is not a sufficiently strong emphasis on developing a range of writing for higher attaining students in Years 7 to 9.

185 By the end of Year 11, students build on their understanding of the topics covered in earlier years and add others such as booking holidays, activities they do on holidays and ways of travelling. In Years 10 and 11 teachers place a strong emphasis on preparation for GCSE examinations and their good subject knowledge of how to do this is leading to higher standards. A majority of students can carry out conversations with others and speak confidently. They can talk about what they did on holiday, for example, and express opinions about the activities they have been involved in. Most students can write accurately with correct tense, verb endings and agreement of adjectives. In general, however, students do not write at length with a range of styles and this limits opportunities for higher attaining students to develop more advanced writing.

186 The quality of teaching and learning is good. During the inspection there was good and very good teaching in over half of the lessons seen and some teaching was excellent. One lesson was observed where teaching was unsatisfactory. In this lesson the teacher did not provide work that was sufficiently challenging to raise standards and allowed too much time for students to complete it. There is inconsistent use of marking of students' work as a means of assessment, to advise students about how to improve and to set targets for improvement. A strong feature of all the teaching is very good class control. This is achieved with good humour and with respect for students. Students' behaviour and attitudes to work are very good. It is this combination of improved teaching and improved attitudes to work that is the main factor in the rise in standards. Relationships between students and with their teachers are very good. As a result there is a happy, relaxed, but very businesslike atmosphere in lessons.

187 There are very good procedures for monitoring and supporting teaching. This has led to greater sharing of good practice and has helped to raise standards. Good procedures are in place for assessing students' attainment and progress. Good use is made of the data supplied to set targets for the subject and to plan the curriculum. The subject makes a good contribution to students' moral, social and cultural development, especially in the annual trips abroad. The subject leader has shown very good leadership and management in developing a team of highly committed and hard-working teachers who are prepared to give generously

of their time to help students improve. The subject has made good progress since the previous inspection.

## MUSIC

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

### Strengths

- Students work with discrimination and concentration.
- Progress is now good and standards of attainment in Years 7 to 9 are much improved.
- Students have very positive attitudes to the subject.
- Teaching is good and much improved since the last inspection.
- Provision of equipment for music technology is now good.

### Areas for improvement

- More regular audio -recording of practical work and marking of written work.
- The time allocation to music in Years 7 to 9 and to the GCSE course.
- Storage for instruments and safe provision for electrical supply.

188 Overall standards of attainment are average. The latest end of Year 9 tests show attainment below average, but the department judged their grading to be too harsh and observation of lessons supports that view. Attainment now meets national average standards with a significant amount that is above average. This is a big improvement on the previous inspection. At the end of Year 11, standards meet examination course averages. There has been drop in GCSE results for A\*-C grades over the last three years but they remain above or close to the national average. There has been an increase in numbers taking the course but there is a much wider range of musical ability in the 2003 cohort. Students receiving instrumental lessons attain good standards for the time they have been learning.

189 In Years 7 to 9 students make progress in improvising and performing on electric keyboards. Their ensemble playing is improving although some lack confidence when it comes to performing to the rest of the class. They are acquiring good knowledge of basic music notation. Their appraisals of others' playing are confident and informed. Vocal skills are less advanced. In the GCSE course, Year 10 students are developing their music technology skills well. Year 11 students' ability to analyse music heard is satisfactory overall but it is variable, with some quite able whilst others struggle. In both years their compositions are inventive, idiomatic and mostly well played. Across the age range those with special educational needs experience success in music and the able, gifted and talented do well, for example a beautiful solo vocal recording by a Year 11 student of her own composition. Students' attitudes to the subject are very positive; they enjoy coming to music. Behaviour is good and there is remarkable self-discipline in independent small group work where, because of the logistics of the situation, instruments have to be collected and taken to the various working areas. This is done without fuss and students are quickly on task and remain so although not directly supervised much of the time.

190 The quality of teaching overall is good. It was reported to be mostly unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9 in the last inspection but it is now good with very good and excellent features, and in Years 10 and 11 it is good. Teaching in instrumental lessons is good overall. Teachers' planning is generally good although not enough vocal activity is planned for. Activities are set at an appropriately high level and varied according to students' abilities. Teaching methods are varied and provide good learning experiences for students. There is brisk pace in lessons and practical activities are never over-extended as they were at the

time of the last inspection. Students receive good on-the-spot feedback on their work and are given many opportunities to comment on their peers' work. Assessment is well referenced to National Curriculum levels but the marking of written work is not done regularly enough. Students' practical work is not audio-recorded on a consistent basis and should be. Appropriate homework is set for those on the GCSE course. Encouraged by the good teaching, students' motivation in lessons is good. They now work well with sustained interest, whereas in the previous inspection this was far from the case.

191 The curriculum offered covers statutory requirements but it needs to reflect a wider stylistic range of music for Years 7 to 9 and to prepare better for the GCSE course. The last report criticised the time allocation and this remains low at both key stages, but the lack of regular ensembles has been addressed. The curriculum supports moral and social education well and makes a strong contribution to multi-cultural education. Subject leadership is good overall. Music now has a positive profile in the school but some aspects of departmental organisation lack rigour. There is now good provision for music technology. The accommodation, although much improved since the last inspection, still presents difficulties. The second classroom is far too small for full classes doing practical work and it is poorly ventilated. There is no instrument store. Trailing mains leads are a health and safety hazard. Because of the lack of headphones the learning environment is poor in keyboard sessions.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

### Strengths

- There is some excellent and some very good teaching.
- The relationships between students and teachers are good and make a significant contribution to students' learning.
- There is good provision for extra-curricular activities.

### Areas for improvement

- Inconsistent use of assessment information linked to target setting.
- The marking of GCSE theory work which does not provide students with appropriate information to help them improve.
- A more consistent approach to teaching and learning.
- Improving standards for those students in Years 10 and 11 who are not studying for GCSE examinations.
- Challenging the most able students.

192 When students enter the school, their standards in physical education are slightly below average. By the end of Year 9, students achieve average levels of attainment and this represents good achievement in relation to their prior attainment. Over the past three years, GCSE results for students achieving the higher grades have improved but levels of attainment for those students not studying GCSE are below average in those activities observed. The quality of teaching overall is good and this promotes good learning.

193 In the end of Year 9 teachers' assessments in 2002, attainment was broadly in line with the national average. In the GCSE examinations in 2002 the proportion of students obtaining A\*-C grades was above the national average and results were broadly in line with those that these students achieved in their other subjects.

194 Inspection evidence shows that the standards obtained by students in Year 9 are satisfactory overall but variable between different activities. This represents good progress overall during their first three years in the school in most areas of the curriculum, given standards observed in Year 7. Students during their first three years in the school apply many of the appropriate techniques and skills to several activities. In gymnastics, they have sound control in simple gymnastic movements and display appropriate body tension in most of their movement. In basketball many of their basic skills were satisfactory but specific basketball skills were below average. In orienteering, all students could read a simple map and set and follow a route successfully. The ability of students in Years 7 to 9 to observe and analyse and to plan performance is unsatisfactory.

195 Standards in Year 11 for those students taking GCSE are above the national average. Evidence from GCSE coursework and from a GCSE theory lesson indicates standards that are just above the national average. Students have a sound understanding of many aspects of the course including physiology and anatomy, and the principles of training. Many students could apply their knowledge of physiology and anatomy to their work on the principles of training. Students in a Year 11 GCSE theory lesson who were revising work on anatomy were using subject-specific vocabulary confidently and were able to discuss functions of muscle groups and relate them to exercise. Standards for those students not taking GCSE were below average for those activities observed. Despite lessons on basketball since the beginning of Year 7, standards for all except a small minority were significantly below average. Most students' basic basketball skills were below average and the majority could not participate successfully in a game. In volleyball, there was a similar picture with the majority of students in Year 11 who were completing their second unit of study unable to perform basic skills.

196 Students' attitudes to learning are good and have a positive impact on standards achieved. Most students are enthusiastic, well behaved, and co-operative, demonstrating a real enjoyment of the subject. They are generally attentive and are able to sustain concentration throughout the lesson. Relationships between students and between students and staff are usually very positive and this is a significant factor in the progress made in most lessons.

197 The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and was unsatisfactory in only one lesson. It was good or better in nearly half of the lessons observed and was excellent in one lesson. In the best lessons a secure knowledge of the subject is regularly conveyed to students through perceptive observation of performance, appropriate intervention and good teacher-directed question and answer sessions. Thorough planning, incorporating varied teaching strategies and an appropriate sequence of activities involving both individual and collaborative learning, is also a feature of these lessons, and discipline and class management are good. In an excellent lesson on revising aspects of the units on anatomy and physiology, the class teacher provided a wide range of activities that ensured all students in the group were engaged for the whole lesson and realised that they were ultimately responsible for their own learning. The class responded with enthusiasm, enjoyed the lesson enormously, supported each other and were very confident when reporting back from their small groups to the whole class. Progress for the whole group was excellent. In the unsatisfactory lesson and to a certain extent in some of the other lessons that were not quite so good, planning was not specific or detailed enough, and the range and type of activities were not appropriate. Here the class teacher also often failed to intervene to help students improve. In many lessons the most able students were rarely extended and teachers' expectations were too low. Assessment of performance by teachers in the best lessons is regularly used to enhance teaching but even in some of these lessons individual students are only rarely set clear targets for improvement. Observation and evaluation by students in lessons, to help improve performance and to develop their evaluative skills, are

unsatisfactory. The recording of assessment using specific criteria linked to the National Curriculum is developing but does not yet involve students in setting their own targets and is not contributing to their progress. Marking of GCSE theory work is not providing enough information to help students make appropriate progress and students are often not aware of how well they are performing, related to GCSE assessment criteria.

198 The curriculum meets statutory requirements at both key stages. Curriculum organisation is good and should ensure that students have the opportunity to develop performance skills in a good range of activities during Years 10 and 11. However, large class sizes and the length of single lessons did restrict progress in some lessons. Schemes of work and curriculum planning are still developing and are not yet consistently guiding teaching and learning. Nor do they regularly identify extension activities for the most able students. Although provision for the use of ICT is identified in departmental documentation there was little evidence of this in any of the work or lessons. The importance of health-related fitness is inconsistently applied and students do not have an appropriate understanding of the importance of fitness to a healthy lifestyle. There is insufficient allocation of time in lessons to develop levels of fitness. There is a good range of activities after school and at lunchtime for students to extend and develop their skills. Many students are involved in school teams and some students are now gaining representative honours. The Under 16 school football team has just reached the national semi-finals.

199 The subject leader has only recently been appointed but has already effected some important changes, not least the good day-to-day organisation of the department. All members of the department are committed and are generous with their time although several have significant other responsibilities. Although the departmental handbook contains most policies and procedures it is still developing and is not yet a good working document. Teaching and learning in the department are being monitored and there has recently been a thorough review which the department is preparing to respond to. There are some opportunities for the department to share good practice although this needs to be extended so that the quality of teaching in different activities is more consistent. Department development planning identifies appropriate priorities but there is no long-term plan. Accommodation is satisfactory, although its use is not always managed effectively and the main teaching room is not providing a very stimulating environment for learning. The changing rooms are a particularly unwelcoming and poorly presented environment for students. They will be refurbished in August 2003

200 Progress since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory. Progress for those students in Years 10 and 11 who do not study GCSE is still unsatisfactory even though they now have more time in lessons.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

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

#### Strengths

- A very clear sense of direction is set by the new subject leader.
- Some teaching is excellent.

#### Areas for improvement

- Too many students are not entered for the examination at the end of Year 11.
- Teachers do not make enough use of assessment to measure attainment accurately and to set students targets for further progress.
- A small but significant amount of teaching is unsatisfactory.

201 In Years 10 and 11 some students choose the GCSE full course but most follow the short course. A small number are not studying for the examination. Results in the GCSE full course in 2002 were in line with the national average and with students' results in other subjects. In the previous two years, results had been well above average. The number of candidates, however, was relatively small and no clear trend emerges. Results in the GCSE short course in 2002 were well below the national average but in the previous year results had been in line with the national average and again no clear trend emerges. What is significant is that the proportion of students achieving a GCSE grade at the end of Year 11 has increased in recent years. Most students now complete Year 11 with a GCSE in religious education.

202 Attainment by the end of Year 9 is at the standard expected. Students show knowledge and understanding of the beliefs and practices of the religions they study. When learning about Christianity, for example, students recognise that the message of Jesus is not only difficult to understand but even more difficult to follow. In their study of Islam students know the Five Pillars and understand how they make a difference to a Muslim's life. They apply what they learn from religion to themselves and to their experience of life. Students learn well and make good progress. Students with special educational needs make good progress, despite the lack of learning assistants in the classroom, because the input and activities of lessons meet their needs. Attitudes are positive and behaviour is good, as are personal development and relationships.

203 Attainment by the end of Year 11 is at the standard expected. Students in Years 10 and 11 follow as a minimum the GCSE short course and most make good progress. Some students in Year 10 have chosen the GCSE full course and these students make excellent progress during their extra early morning lesson. In Year 11 most students follow the GCSE short course and make satisfactory progress. The attainment of students in Year 11 who are not being prepared for the examination is well below average. These students lack the incentive of working towards the examination and their progress is unsatisfactory. Although students in Year 11 who have chosen the GCSE full course as an option make satisfactory progress, they are on the way to results that are below the national average. In most lessons in Years 10 and 11 attitudes and behaviour are good, as are personal development and relationships. The exception is the two groups of students deemed unsuitable for entry to the examination. In one of the groups attitudes are too negative for satisfactory progress.

204 Teaching and learning are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is better in Years 10 and 11 because it builds well on what has been learned in Years 7 to 9 and because it is directed towards success at GCSE. Teachers make very good use of time. Lessons begin promptly. Students generally make a good effort and work at a good pace and so very little time is wasted. Teachers' use of learning resources is also very good. These range from well-chosen videos to well-written worksheets. In the best lessons teachers also use the students themselves as resources and as agents in their own

learning. Management and motivation of students in Years 7 to 9 are generally satisfactory or better, sometimes excellent, but also sometimes unsatisfactory. In Years 10 and 11 teachers manage and motivate students very well and achieve high standards of behaviour, except where students have become demotivated and difficult to engage. Planning of lessons is very good. Most teachers have clear objectives and show sufficient detail in the sequence of activities. Teachers also use methods that enable students to make progress whatever their level of prior attainment. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of religion, and of the purpose of religious education, are a challenge and inspiration to students.

205 Assessment and the use of assessment in teaching and learning are areas in need of substantial improvement. Present procedures for assessment are not sufficiently related to the scale of attainment. Teachers do not make enough use of level descriptors during lessons to show students what they can already do and what they need to do to improve. The use of specific targets rather than general aspirations would raise students' awareness of what the next level is and how to reach it. Teachers' use of homework to extend work done in class is generally appropriate. Teachers do not, however, do enough to show students how the homework may complete one lesson or lead to the next. Teachers do not use completed homework as a starter to lessons or make clear to students how their homework shows how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

206 Provision for students' personal development, including moral, social and cultural development, is very good. Students have repeated opportunities to think about moral issues. Religious education promotes the capacity to consider good and evil and helps students to learn to distinguish right from wrong. Students also learn about society and how to live responsibly while respecting people who have a different point of view. The programmes of study include Christianity and other major religions of the world. Teachers help students to appreciate the richness and diversity of different traditions. Provision for spiritual development is good. Most of the teaching shows sensitivity to the spiritual dimension of life and helps students to gain in self-knowledge and self-esteem.

207 Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. The college has implemented the new agreed syllabus but has not yet incorporated the new scale of attainment into its work. In Years 10 and 11, students follow a GCSE full or short course with a view to entry to the examination. The college appointed the present subject leader last September and the new leadership has ensured a very clear educational direction. Within the department there is both commitment to improvement and the capacity to succeed. Religious education reflects well the aims and values of the college by generating positive attitudes to success within a commitment to equality of opportunity. A particular strength is that all students receive specialist teaching. Another is the en-suite accommodation. The main obstacles to continuing success are the pockets of unsatisfactory teaching and the lack of effective procedures for assessment and for the use of assessment. Another obstacle is the number of students in Year 11 who follow the GCSE short course without any prospect of being entered for the examination. An area that is satisfactory but capable of further improvement is the monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching. All these improvements are possible now that religious education enjoys a new and very clear sense of direction in the college.

## **VOCATIONAL COURSES**

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

Strengths

- Standards are well above national figures, particularly in the highest grades.
- Students make very good progress.
- Teaching is very good. Teaching stimulates and encourages very good learning.
- Very good leadership and management underpin the work of the department.

Areas for improvement

- There is a lack of appropriate textbooks.
- There is insufficient in-class access to ICT.

208 At GCSE, standards are well above national averages. Results in 2002, at 74 per cent A\*-C, are well above national figures of 54 per cent. What is particularly significant is the high number of grade A\* and grade A students (25 per cent compared to national figures of 12 per cent). In the work seen and in class work, students continue to work at levels which are well above national expectations. Students confidently deal with business concepts and apply appropriate business terminology effectively. For example, in their studies of aspects of finance, Year 11 students both understand the concepts of gross and net profit margins and can calculate them using correct formulae.

209 From an average level of attainment at entry to the course in Year 10, students' achievement is very good, particularly in the maturation of conceptual understanding. Students with special educational needs also make very good progress, because their teachers know them well, use appropriate materials and provide effective guidance in lessons.

210 Teaching is very good. Teachers know their subject very well. They have an obvious love for it and this commitment is strongly communicated to students, providing a firm basis for learning, which is also very good. Lessons are well planned and teachers use a wide range of methods that support teaching well. For example, in one Year 10 lesson, with lower attaining students, the teacher used a blindfold chocolate tasting test to show how desk and field research is used to help manufacturers maintain brand loyalty and marketing share. This stimulated and engaged students and led to very good learning. There is appropriate emphasis on literacy and the use of correct technical language. Students are encouraged to evaluate their own work and that of their colleagues and this provides a very good basis for student awareness of their own levels and the steps needed to improve.

210 Students' response is very good and this reflects their good teaching. Students settle quickly to task, remain on task and sustain concentration.

211 Resources are adequate. The department lacks an effective range of textbooks and other materials. There is a lack of access to ICT and not all lessons are taught in business designated accommodation. There is, however, very good use of a college produced revision guide which is replete with examples and case studies as well as examination exercises.

212 Leadership and management are very good. The current subject leader is unwell. Nevertheless, under her supervision, the department has produced a range of informed and informative documents that deal effectively with all aspects of the department's work. The recently appointed temporary subject leader gives very effective and very efficient leadership to the subject. In all her work, she is very well supported by her colleagues, including senior colleagues.

213 Business studies is an increasingly popular subject choice for many students. This reflects the very good teaching, learning and results which obtain. The subject has made very good progress since the time of the last report.

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

In the inspection, 13 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001, the latest year for which national comparisons are available.

### ***GCE AS level courses***

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	2	50	52	0	2	0.5	0.8
Mathematics	1	0	62	0	15	0	0.5

### ***GCE A level and AVCE courses***

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	3	100	87	67	43	6.7	5.8
Biology	5	80	88	40	34	5.2	5.3
Physics	5	100	88	20	40	4.8	5.7
Full Design and Technology	16	94	91	13	30	5.3	5.4
Business Studies	1	100	92	100	32	8.0	5.5
Business (VQ)	7	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	14.6	10.5
Computer Studies	12	75	86	0	23	2.5	4.6
Sports/PE Studies	9	100	92	22	25	5.3	5.1
Art and Design	24	100	96	54	46	7.4	6.6
Geography	12	92	92	33	38	5.0	5.7
History	12	83	88	42	35	5.2	5.5
English Literature	19	100	95	21	37	4.7	5.9
Media Studies	44	98	93	14	31	5.2	5.5
French	7	86	89	0	38	2.3	5.6
Other Languages	1	100	93	0	56	4.0	6.8

### ***Intermediate vocational qualifications***

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Leisure and Tourism	8	72	n/a	55	n/a	13.5	n/a

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

### MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus was on A-level courses in mathematics and physics. The GCSE mathematics course for sixth form students was also sampled. One lesson was observed. In that lesson students failed to make suitable progress because they did not possess the appropriate skills for the work being done. Students did not understand the work they were learning but carried out tasks mechanically. A-level biology and chemistry were also sampled. These lessons were taught well and the students made good progress.

#### Mathematics

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

##### Strengths

- More students are choosing to study mathematics.
- Students work hard because of their positive attitudes to the subject.

##### Areas for improvement

- Students do not always understand the work they are doing
- Considerable amounts of work are not marked.
- Work is not always at the right level for students.

214 A-level results in 2001 were above the national average, but there were only three candidates, all of whom were male. Students gained higher grades than they did in their other subjects. (2001 is the latest year for which national data is available.) Results in 2002 were not as good. Students did not gain grades as high as they might have expected, based on their GCSE results. In the last two years, the subject has increased in popularity. One advantage of this is that students in Year 13 are now offered a choice for one of the units they take. Only a small number of students who started the course in September 2002 are no longer studying the subject.

215 Students in Year 13 have a sound grasp of the basic elements of the subject. For example, they can differentiate and integrate a range of simple functions. However, many students work very mechanically for much of the time, without a full understanding of the work they are doing. This leads to them having difficulties applying their work to more extended problems. A considerable number of students started Year 12 with lower levels of achievement than are normally found. Because they are not fully competent with some topics which they covered in GCSE, their progress on their AS course is restricted. Students' achievement is satisfactory in relation to the standards they had reached on starting the course.

216 Teaching, overall, is satisfactory. No unsatisfactory lessons were observed. In the best lessons, teachers show a good understanding of the needs of each student. They structure the lesson well so students build their knowledge at an appropriate pace. This was seen to good effect with students in Year 13 learning about bodies in equilibrium. In this lesson the teacher took what the students already knew and applied it to a new situation where it did not work. Students then were well led to see how their previous way of working needed to be extended. The students realised for themselves how they might do this. Another good feature of this lesson was the way in which the teacher used the lift of an aeroplane as

an example. This showed students how their learning would be used. In less effective lessons, teachers do not build upon what students already know. The content of the lesson does not challenge appropriately the wide range of students.

217 Whilst much work is marked, the folders of work of several students contain large amounts of work which has not been marked. This means that the students are less aware of the progress they are making in that work. Some teachers include helpful comments on students' work especially when a student has made an error. Other teachers merely indicate whether an answer is correct or not, which is less helpful.

218 Students display positive attitudes to the subject. They complete large amounts of work, practising their skills. They persevere even when they experience difficulties and take good advantage of the support offered by teachers, such as when teachers offer to meet students at times when they are not teaching. Students respond well to these invitations.

219 The subject leader provides satisfactory management and leadership of the course. The increase in numbers since the previous inspection represents a good improvement. The subject leader is aware of the difficulties students face and is seeking ways to circumvent these. The progress students make is adequately recorded and appropriate use is made of this information. Work remains to be done to develop the skills, particularly of less experienced teachers, to meet the wide range of ability found in teaching groups. Greater support should be provided for students choosing to study the course who have not reached standards normally found. Students' progress is monitored carefully but greater use should be made of this information to raise standards further.

## Physics

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

### Strengths

- Good teaching.
- Modern curriculum.

### Areas for improvement

- Recruitment and retention of students.

220 The group size for physics has been fairly small (seven students in 2002) but consistent in the past three years. Pass rates in physics have been above the national average for the past three years and each year some students achieve good grades, though none have achieved the highest grade. Those students who complete the AS year in physics nearly always achieve a pass grade. However, a significant number of students who start Year 12 transfer to other subjects or stop taking the subject. Very few girls take physics. A small number of students each year join the physics group from other schools. The Salters course has been offered for the past two years and provides a modern, well-resourced scheme that has an emphasis on applications of physics in the real world. The two teachers of physics are both well qualified and one of these has several years experience of teaching both more traditional courses and Salters.

221 The work in students' files was at an appropriate level and nearly all coursework exercises and tests come directly from the Salters resource material or the student textbooks. Students make good use of ICT for modelling, calculations and the display of data. Some of the work seen was not well organised in files and poorly presented. The performance of students is in line with expectations based on prior achievement and A-level grades achieved are similar to those predicted by teachers.

222 Teaching is good. Learning outcomes are presented for every lesson using *PowerPoint*, and good use is made of visual material from the Internet. Topics such as the structure and properties of the general gas equation are introduced from the perspective of astronomy. Data sets are obtained from laboratory apparatus and modelled using spreadsheets, leading to an exploration of properties of gases, the Kelvin scale and the need to control variables when making measurements. A characteristic of all the teaching seen was the high quality of dialogue and questioning during lessons. In practical exercises students have to make their own decisions about the choice of measuring instruments, estimate errors and justify their approach. Year 13 students demonstrated good proficiency in investigating the root mean square velocity of gas molecules with a spreadsheet. Year 12 students demonstrated good practical skills in an investigation into the concentration of sugar solutions using critical angle measurements – a methodology that was related to commercial use.

223 The small size of groups allows for individual differences in understanding and mathematical proficiency to be addressed at the individual level, to the benefit of students.

224 The subject is managed efficiently and the two staff regularly attend meetings and training events organised by Salters. The scheme is very well documented with teachers' guides and assessment instruments and supported by specially designed apparatus which provides a rich learning experience. To improve further, the subject needs to identify prospective students in Year 10 or earlier and ensure that they receive appropriate support and guidance and undertake some enhancement work in physics, possibly through some involvement with projects.

## **ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING**

The focus was on design and technology.

### **Design and technology**

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

#### Strengths

- Examination standards that match students' abilities and the national average.
- Inter-disciplinary team approach to A-level teaching.
- Very good teaching of essential theory, using practical and industrial illustrations.
- Assessment practices that ensure that students are aware of the standard of work.

#### Areas for improvement

- More detailed and rigorous monitoring of what students are actually achieving during the practical production of their design solutions.
- Timetable provision for Years 12 and 13 that gives unrestricted access to the facilities required and the expertise of specialist teachers.
- Maximise the use of ICT and systems and control by all students.

225 Standards in the product design courses at AS and A-levels are good. Results in 2001 at A-level were in line with the national average, and matched predicted grades based on evidence of prior learning and attainment. AS grades in 2001 were good but the proportion of students gaining A-C grades was lower than predicted. In 2002, grades improved further in relation to the ability profile of the students, but there were fewer A-C grades. Since 1999

there has been a systematic growth in the number of students studying product design and almost all students succeed in gaining at least a pass grade at AS and A-levels.

226 Attainment in lessons is in line with the national average overall. Analysis of students' work indicates standards across the full range of A-level grades. The most able students achieve very high standards producing some original and imaginative solutions to product design briefs. Most students make good progress in knowledge, understanding and skills during the AS course through very good teaching. This is carried through to the specialist study and underpinning theory sessions on the A-level course in Year 13.

227 Progress in coursework projects at A-level and AS-levels is less secure, especially by lower attaining students. At this stage in the courses, projects should be further advanced towards completion and the rush to complete is having a detrimental effect on the quality of work. The development of coursework needs to be more rigorously monitored for what is being achieved lesson by lesson. The success of students on the course over the past few years has brought about increased numbers of students who want to participate. This has led to an unsatisfactory timetabling situation, as students do not always have access to the right facilities or to a teacher who is a specialist in their area of work. More teachers are now involved in the A-level teaching team and the range of their expertise is a strength. However, students need particular expertise according to their project, and this help is not always available. Consideration needs to be given to paired teaching during the practical coursework sessions.

228 In theory lessons students learn quickly. They come to lessons with good attitudes to work and often begin productive activities before the lesson formally starts. The most able are clear about the next stages of learning or task to be undertaken. Weaker students rely too much on the teacher to set the pace of learning, and lack confidence in working independently. All students have good communication and literacy skills, but they are less secure in the use of ICT in a design context.

229 Teaching on a one-to-one basis is very good. It is similarly very good in more formal theoretical lessons and when reviewing recently marked work. One such lesson was excellent. In this lesson students were considering the properties of different materials under a structured series of heading, according to particular uses and forms of manufacture. The teacher used common everyday objects, such as a section of plastic window frame, a plastic chair, a metal chair that had been dip-coated and a mountain bike, to illustrate and get the students to think through how fitness for purpose, cost and particular properties influence the choice of materials by designers. The content was skilfully linked to examination criteria for marking, illustrating very effectively for students how they need to apply their knowledge to examination questions. The pace of learning in this lesson was excellent.

230 Teaching is less secure in those lessons where students move about the department seeking an appropriate place to work, and a specialist teacher for advice. Weaker students spend too much time without a clear focus for their work and do not achieve sufficient progress in any particular lesson. These students need to have much clearer targets set for what has to be done lesson by lesson, and the monitoring of what has been done rigidly applied. Nevertheless, when there is a good match between teacher specialisation and the needs of individual students, progress is very good.

231 The leadership and management of the course are good. There is a clear scheme of work well matched to course requirements. A very good team of teachers are involved in course delivery but roles and functions during practical lessons need to be more closely defined. The marking and assessment of work are good; students are well aware of the standard they are reaching. Good attempts have been made to widen the scope of the

course to appeal to more students but increases in the number of students following the subject have overtaken planning for effective delivery. The development of the course would benefit from inclusion in the subject development plan produced by the subject leader. This would enable timetable and professional development issues to be focused on more clearly.

232 The limited access to computers and appropriate software to support A-level study of design is a particular weakness. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

## **BUSINESS**

The focus was on business studies.

### **Business studies**

Overall the provision in business studies is **good**.

#### Strengths

- Teaching by dedicated team is good.
- Students make good progress.
- The leadership and management of the subject is very good.

#### Areas for improvement

- Accommodation is unsatisfactory for current provision and is insufficient for the potential expansion of the department.
- There are too few learning resources and students do not read widely enough around the subject.
- ICT is not used enough by students.

233 In the sixth form, the college offers GNVQ intermediate level, and AVCE single and double awards. There are currently no candidates for GNVQ intermediate provision as students have opted for either the single or double award or GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism.

234 At post 16, results at AVCE are generally in line with national figures. Students confidently use a wide range of business terminology. They demonstrate clear understanding of key business concepts. Work is thorough and covers the requirements of the assessment evidence grid in a broad way. The strengths of the students' class work are their basic understanding of the subject matter and the steady accumulation of knowledge, which is well organised in their files. Students are increasingly confident with the analysis, interpretation and evaluation of data, though these still remain relative weaknesses. The standards reached by current students, as seen in lessons and in their written work, are above average. Their projects are interesting, well produced and professionally presented.

235 In Year 13, students make good progress in understanding the central ideas of accounting and finance. For example, in their work on the preparation of financial statements, students know the four fundamental concepts that underpin accounting procedures. The higher attaining students are particularly adept at understanding accounting conventions which lie behind accounts preparation such as the 'prudence' concept and the 'going concern' concept and they recognise effectively how these conventions and assumptions are put into practice with regard to certain items when preparing final accounts. The lower attaining students are able to apply the appropriate equations and calculations to produce accurate accounts, or to interpret a set of figures in a trial balance.

236 From a relatively low basis of entry to the sixth form, achievement is good overall and students make good progress. Students' overall achievement is, however, restricted by a lack of wider and in-depth reading around the subject. This is sometimes a result of additional interests outside school which impact on the time they can devote to learning.

237 Overall, the quality of the teaching on all courses in the department is good. In the best lessons, teachers have excellent rapport with students, and their expert subject knowledge underpins discussion and lends clarity to the explanations provided. Lessons are carefully planned, and effective use is made of case studies and other activities to allow students to apply and extend their learning. Students are very well supported academically, although there is some inconsistency in marking and in attitudes towards late or the non-completion of work. The teachers' methodical explanations promote considerable gains in the lower attaining students' comprehension. However, in those lessons judged to be satisfactory, a tendency to over-provide such help for the students is partly at the expense of ensuring that students have enough practice in the kinds of analysis that will enable them to become more independent learners. Progress is best where students apply assessment and evaluative criteria to their work.

238 Generally, students respond very well in lessons. Their attitudes are mature and they sustain interest. They listen attentively to each other's presentations, and they are mature and mutually supportive. Higher attaining students maintain intellectual rigour and they portray evidence of wider reading. Too often, however, some students are happy to be passive recipients rather than active participants in their own learning. A small but not insignificant number of students, particularly but not exclusively those of a lower ability, fail to complete assignments on time. Students have very positive views of the subject. They particularly appreciate the very clear organisation and structure of their courses, and the clear feedback on their attainment and progress.

239 The department's philosophy about entrance to the sixth form echoes the philosophy of the college, and students are encouraged to enter a sixth form which provides a broad, balanced curriculum and offers opportunities for success. The vocationally-oriented curriculum is a strong feature of the success of the department.

240 Resources are inadequate. The department lacks an effective range of textbooks and other materials. The lack of sufficient access to ICT and the appropriate professional software has an adverse effect on learning. Accommodation is currently inadequate and unsatisfactory in terms of both size of rooms and adequacy of appropriate specialist accommodation. The poverty of accommodation and the concomitant lack of access to appropriate ICT facilities impacts detrimentally on standards. The college is aware of this and clear plans are in place to re-house the department in appropriate new accommodation in the new academic year.

241 Leadership and management are very good. The current subject leader is unwell and has been away for some months. Nevertheless, under her supervision, the department has produced a range of informed and informative documents that deal effectively with all aspects of the department's work. The recently appointed temporary subject leader for business studies gives very effective and very efficient leadership to the subject. In all her work, she is very well supported by her colleagues, whom she supports in turn. She has a clear vision for the future of the department which sensibly encompasses plans to strengthen both the academic and the vocational aspects of the department's provision to meet the wide and differing needs and aspirations of future groups of students. She provides an excellent role model for a department that is committed to high standards and high achievement. In this

she is well supported by her colleagues. Business studies has made good progress since the time of the last report.

### **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)**

The focus was on ICT. The college offers a course in computer system management that is run by a worldwide computer company and this was also sampled. This course is run over two years and is of A-level standard. One lesson was observed. This was a good lesson in which students enjoyed using the on-line tutorials by which this course is taught to learn about computer networks. Regular testing gives students a strong understanding of the progress they make.

#### **Information and communication technology**

Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology is **very good**.

##### **Strengths**

- Very good teaching leads to students learning very well.
- Students work with high levels of independence.
- Students gain confidence as a result of their very good attitudes and relations with their teachers.
- Teachers monitor students' progress very carefully.
- The subject is very well led and managed.

##### **Area for improvement**

- Students cannot access work stored on the college's computer system from home.

242 The course has been well chosen to meet the needs of students. The number of students choosing the course has almost trebled in three years. No student who started the course at the beginning of the college year has abandoned their study. The only students who did not continue from Year 12 to Year 13 last year chose to leave the college at this point.

243 In 2001, the latest year for which national data is available, A-level results were well below the national average and students did not do as well in ICT as in their other subjects. 2001 was the first that students had taken A-levels. Results in 2002 showed a marked improvement. Too small a number of female students sat the examination in either year to make a comparison between the results of male and female students. In 2002, students gained results better than they might have expected based upon their GCSE results.

244 Work seen during the inspection was at the national average. Students achieve well in relation to the results they gained at GCSE. They are good at analysing the ways in which computers can be used in real business. They use this information well to produce high quality computer applications, many of which are used by those companies. Students do not always appreciate the importance of fully documenting their work and, generally, they do not evaluate this work to the same standard as the rest of their work.

245 Teaching is very good which is why students learn so well. Teachers place a very strong emphasis on developing students' abilities to work independently. They very skilfully guide students if they have problems without doing the work for them. One very good example was seen when a teacher distributed several handbooks for a number of products and asked the students what they noticed about the content and layout of the handbooks. They then used this information to identify for themselves what was missing from the guides they were writing for their own projects. Teachers work very hard to develop very good relations with their students. They are available to answer questions throughout the college day and are tireless in the support they provide. Because of this, students' confidence is high.

All students contribute to discussions. Students know that their contribution will be valued – there is no sense of failure in lessons. An on-line forum is greatly appreciated by students and is a very effective method by which they can exchange ideas and help each other learn. This is complemented by the weekly tutorial given to each student as they work on their projects.

246 Whilst the college is rightly concerned about the security of its computer system, it means that students cannot access work from home. This is at best an inconvenience and in the worst instances restricts progress as students readily undertake great amounts of work outside college.

247 The subject is very well led and managed by the subject leader who is now in his second year in the post. He has placed high emphasis on developing students' ability to work independently. This was not previously seen as important. Understandably, students took some time to appreciate the benefits of this approach. For that reason, their achievement over time does not yet reflect the very good learning that occurs in lessons. Nevertheless, students make good progress.

248 The subject leader has established a very strong team of teachers. He has collated very extensive resources which students use very well to help them learn. He has set up a very detailed computerised system to record the progress each student is making. This information is combined to great effect with teachers' detailed knowledge of every student so that each student is very well supported throughout the course. Good progress has been made since the last inspection because of the growth in the popularity of the subject and the increase in standards.

## **HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL**

The focus was on physical education.

### **Physical education**

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

#### **Strengths**

- The very good attitude of students and the relationship between students and staff.
- Very good teaching.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Marking to clearly identify targets for improvement.
- Opportunities for students to use AS and A2 examinations regularly to establish progress in all units of work.

249 In the GCE A-level examinations in 2001 the percentage of A-B grades was just below the national average although the percentage of students achieving A-E grades was above the national average. Overall, students achieved better than the national average.

250 In the GCE A-level examinations in 2002 results were slightly below those predicted and students did not perform quite as well in physical education as they did in other A-level subjects. In the AS examination in 2002, results were significantly below those predicted, on the basis of prior attainment. Unavoidable changes of staff during the year were a contributory factor and these students have since retaken some of the modules and improved their grades significantly.

251 Standards of work of current students conform to standards expected in relation to predictions based on their GCSE results. Written work for the majority of students illustrates a good understanding of much of the work covered and there are comprehensive notes. There are limited opportunities for students to apply this knowledge and understanding consistently to examination questions. There are very good notes on the history of sport and on the social and cultural influences that led to the development of sport and physical education in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Some good investigative skills can be seen in students' performance profiles where knowledge of physiology and anatomy and the principles of exercise are applied to devising a personal exercise plan linked to a specific sport.

252 Teaching is very good overall and students learn well as a result. Good planning, appropriately varied teaching methods and very good relationships with the students were a feature of the good teaching seen. Objectives at times lacked the specific clarity necessary to ensure that students of all abilities made appropriate progress.

253 Teachers illustrate good subject knowledge through their exposition and through their question and answer sessions with students. This contributes to the good learning. There are good opportunities for students to work independently, to take responsibility for their own learning and often to help others to learn. This was a feature of a well-structured lesson in Year 13 where students worked together to revise work on exercise physiology. After an appropriate introduction and reminder of key issues by the teacher, students were given the responsibility of answering an A-level question. The teacher divided the class into small groups and each group was responsible for providing an answer for part of the question. Time was appropriately limited and the teacher provided very good support as the groups discussed their answers. Both the level of discussion and the commitment of the students were reflected in very good presentations by all groups to the whole class towards the end of the lesson. As a result all students in the class made very good progress.

254 Students learnt very well in all lessons. They were co-operative and attentive, worked productively and responded well to the supportive teaching and different learning styles they experienced. They work well in groups, support each other and listen well to each other's ideas. Most students in both Year 12 and Year 13 are confident in offering their own ideas.

255 The good teaching in the subject is supported in many respects by effective leadership and management. Day-to-day organisation is good and there is a clear commitment to improving standards. Students are set targets based on prior attainment at the beginning of their courses and these are monitored and adapted appropriately during the course. However, targets for students are not focused sharply enough on specific learning goals or on enough information from analysis of students' work. Marking is not rigorous enough and does not consistently and clearly identify targets for improvement; nor are there sufficient opportunities for students to produce work for in-depth assessment. The department development plan does not identify in enough detail the priorities for the sixth form. There are restricted opportunities and not enough encouragement for students to utilise ICT on the course.

## VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was on art and design and music technology. Theatre studies and media studies were also sampled.

256 A-level and AS courses in drama and theatre studies were sampled and lessons observed in Years 12 and 13. Recent results indicate that standards are above average overall. Students develop their dramatic skills and use technical terms and theatrical concepts well in spoken and written work. They understand the impact of projection, gesture and body language and apply these skills in performance. The best written work is perceptive and gives a personal response from a theatrical viewpoint although the work of lower attaining students is rather generalised with some conclusions not developed fully enough. Under the leadership of an enthusiastic and well-informed co-ordinator, teachers create an animated and motivating environment in which good learning takes place providing a good contribution to students' personal development. This is enhanced by opportunities for students to take part in workshops and school productions and a yearly pantomime of their own devising.

257 Media studies was sampled and lessons were observed on AS and A2 courses. Standards in AS and A2 examinations were below average in 2002. However, work seen during the inspection was in line with national averages and sometimes well above. The quality of provision overall is good. Students' coursework indicates that they know and use key concepts to deconstruct texts and evaluate ideologies within a range of modern media. Students develop good understanding of the purposes of media techniques and their impact on different audiences. Students' coursework reflects the breadth of content studied and their eager response to fresh and interesting areas of study. For example, students in a Year 12 class were constructing their own entertainment webzine, identifying their target audience and the form of presentation. All were engrossed in this activity and the urgency of meeting the deadline for completion of the task. Teaching in the lessons seen was lively and provided good opportunities for developing skills in critical analysis. Teachers and students together generate an exciting and adventurous learning atmosphere, which encourages independent learning. The use of ICT is very good and there are very effective links with English.

### Art and design

Overall the quality of provision is **very good**.

#### Strengths

- Teaching is very good; teachers are very well-informed and possess very good subject knowledge.
- Teachers make very good use of questioning to draw responses from students.
- Students are highly articulate and capable of expressing their own views and opinions.
- Students make very good use of media and materials within a traditional context to create interesting images.

#### Area for improvement

- The narrowness of the curriculum that places undue emphasis on art and craft activities.
- Target-setting based upon objective criteria.
- Access to modern technology; photography and ICT in the art studios.

258 In the GCE AS-level examination in 2001 the percentage of students in the school that achieved the highest grades of A to B at 56 per cent was well above the national figure of 23 per cent. The results in the 2002 examination showed a remarkable improvement, up to 74

per cent achieving the highest grades of A or B. In the GCE A-level examination in 2001, 55 per cent of students achieved grades A or B as opposed to a national figure of 46 per cent, which is above national expectations. However, in 2002 this figure rose to 83 per cent, which shows a remarkable improvement over the previous year's results.

259 The standard of work that students in Year 13 are producing is well above national expectations. These students have acquired the capacity to critically evaluate not only their own work, but that of others in the group and also that of professional artists. They respond very positively to prompting from their teachers who probe to discover their depth of knowledge and understanding of art, craft and design. Year 13 students are making excellent use of their visual diaries in which to record their own research and investigations into a wide range of themes. They make very good use of written text to make their intentions clear to others. In lessons seen during the inspection, these students were involved in animated discussion about the nature of reality and illusion. This drew very interesting and highly personal comments from them. The teachers set challenging exercises for them which fully engaged their powers of imaginative speculation and curiosity. They were encouraged to make new connections that involved creative and intellectual effort on their part. This ensured that they worked with a very high degree of independence to resolve issues and problems for themselves. There were many aspects of these lessons that reflected excellent dialogue between students and teachers.

260 Students in Year 12 are also making very good progress and are producing work of a standard that is well above the national average. During the inspection they were observed to engage in an exercise that required that they critically evaluate their own work and that of others in the group. This was a very interesting process which was very well led by the teacher who posed a range of questions that challenged their knowledge and understanding of painting and the creation of images on a two-dimensional surface. These students are highly articulate and made very well-informed responses to his line of questioning. The discussion was challenging for the majority of them and they were obliged to rationalise their opinions and the views that they expressed. They also are making very good use of written text in their visual diaries to clarify their intentions, for themselves and for their audience. Most students are working within a very traditional model of the curriculum that places emphasis on the use of pencils, charcoal, coloured pencils, water-based paints, acrylic paints and oil paints to produce finished objects.

261 Teaching is very good and two of the three lessons seen were excellent. Teachers possess very good subject knowledge and are very well informed about the history of art and also about the GCE A-level examination requirements. Questioning is used to very good effect to open up discussion and debate which enables students to demonstrate their depth of knowledge and understanding of the use of visual imagery to communicate concepts, ideas, attitudes, feelings and beliefs to others. Introductions to lessons are very good, the result of thorough planning having been carried out. Good use is made of exemplar material such as art history books, but there is an opportunity here to make much greater use of film strips, videos, television, CD-ROMs and even DVDs as means of stimulating students' interest and raising levels of motivation on the part of some students. Teachers have very high expectations of the students and make effective use of a variety of teaching methods to ensure that they provide good advice and support during lessons. Due to very good teaching, which has some excellent qualities, learning is also very good.

262 Leadership and management are very good. Good systems are in place to monitor students' progress, but these can be improved and greater use made of objective data to provide more focused feedback to individual students. There is a new subject leader who has already had a very positive impact on the overall management and running of the department. He is committed to building on past achievement and to improving standards. The current

curriculum that is on offer to students is rather narrow and students have little opportunity to produce images using modern technology, photography or computers, digital cameras, scanners and printers, within a work-related design context.

263 Accommodation is very good. There are four large art studios but storage remains an issue particularly of large three-dimensional pieces of work. Learning resources are very good, but students have very limited access to ICT or photography facilities within the art studios themselves.

264 Improvement since the last inspection is very good. Students continue to achieve grades in the GCE AS and A-level examinations that are well above the national average. Students in both Years 12 and 13 are currently producing work of a standard that is well above national expectations.

### Music technology

The provision for music technology is **good**.

#### Strengths

- Satisfactory take-up for this new course.
- Students' motivation and progress.
- The quality of the teaching.
- Resources.

#### Areas for improvement

- The extent of students' previous music experience.
- The aural environment on occasions.

265 At the time of the last inspection there was no music on the sixth form curriculum. The music technology course was introduced in September 2001 and the first candidates sat the AS-level examination in summer 2002, going on to A2 level study in the present academic year. A new AS group started in September 2002. Take-up is satisfactory; there are eight students in each group. The 2002 AS examination results were slightly below predictions based on previous performance; national comparisons are not yet available. In relation to course expectations students' achievement is now average overall.

266 Some students are disadvantaged by not having done GCSE music. Nevertheless most Year 12 students have sufficient knowledge of conventional notation to work with the music computer software programs, though some lack sufficient understanding of simple harmony. They are gaining competence in music technology skills. Year 13 students are developing good compositions using sequencers. Some find detailed analytical exercises very challenging. Students' achievement in relation to their ability is good. Both the musically less able and the able, gifted and talented are making good progress in composition and studio techniques, and Year 13 students' theoretical knowledge has improved. Students' attitudes to the subject are extremely positive. The course has strongly motivated them and they spend many extra hours in the music area practising and working with the technology equipment.

267 Teaching is good and there are some very good features. The teachers have the necessary knowledge and skills to teach the course. Lessons are very well planned with copious support materials to guide students' understanding. The pace is brisk and lessons are carefully structured, providing good learning. Teachers work well with students on an individual basis, appropriate to their ability, to clarify their thinking, helping them to solve problems as they arise. Suitable homework is set. The clear teaching enables students to

develop their understanding and confidence in the subject well. Even with these typically smaller sixth form groups, the acoustics are poor when all are working together at keyboards without headphones.

268 With students spending so much of their 'free' time working on their individual projects, direct teaching time allocated is adequate. However, much of the teaching is necessarily on a one-to-one basis and the provision of extra specialist staffing, as is the case in many schools offering this course, would be beneficial. Accommodation is adequate and the department is well resourced with computers and a properly equipped recording studio. The course is at an early stage of development and is well organised. It is a new course for all schools and contact with other schools offering music technology at A-level would further strengthen staff confidence in their ability to deliver this challenging curriculum.

## HUMANITIES

The focus was on history, geography and religious education.

### History

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

#### Strengths

- Teaching is very good.
- Students have very positive attitudes to their work.
- Relationships are excellent.

#### Area for improvement

- The department does not have sufficient textbooks and does not make good enough use of those that it does have.

269 The A2 examination results in 2001 were below the national average at grades A-E, although a higher than average proportion (41per cent) gained grades A or B. The results in 2002 were higher overall at grades A-E, but a smaller proportion gained grades A or B. The proportion gaining grades A-E has increased from 75 per cent in 1999 to 92 per cent in 2002. The results represent very good progress from their GCSE standards for the majority of students. Students currently in Years 12 and 13 are overall making very good progress as a result of very good teaching and their own hard work. The numbers taking history are rising.

270 The standard of work seen from students in Year 12 is overall in line with that expected nationally. A small proportion is on target to reach the top grades. Most students have good knowledge and understanding of the periods of history they are studying. They use historical sources well and understand the nature of bias. Students studying Russia successfully identified ways in which the Bolsheviks portrayed Lenin in art to show a heroic image. They used ICT very well to annotate paintings with examples of propaganda. Students studying the Reformation, however, lacked enough basic knowledge about Protestant and Catholic beliefs to enable them to make good progress at the start of the topic. The quality of essays produced by students in Year 12 is below average overall. The essays from the small number of high attainers do reach above average at times, but they do not back up their views sufficiently consistently to reach the top grades regularly. The work from some lower attainers is often poorly expressed and includes irrelevant detail.

271 The work seen from students in Year 13 was, overall, average. They demonstrate sound knowledge and understanding. A group studying the Cold War successfully identified

the points of tension between the USA and Russia between 1945 and 1965 and successfully evaluated the Cuban missile crisis as a major point of tension. All suggested valid alternative events, but the lower attainers found it difficult to explain their choices fully.

272 Teaching is very good overall, and often excellent. It is a major contributory factor in the students' good progress in both Years 12 and 13. Excellent relationships lead to a very good working atmosphere in lessons. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which they communicate effectively. The work set is appropriately demanding. The helpful comments on marked work provide students with clear guidance on how to improve their answers.

273 Teaching methods ensure that the students have a variety of ways in which to learn. Effective group work allows students to support one another. Teachers use resources very well, as, for example, the very effective use of overhead projector resources which allowed the teacher to display very clearly the students' decisions on the key moments of tension between the USA and Russia in the 1950s and 1960s. Good information sheets provided by teachers eliminate the need for students to spend time in lessons simply taking notes. The department does not, however, make enough use of textbooks; this restricts the development of the students' capacity (and especially that of the high attainers) to use books for independent research. The department does not have sufficient textbooks; some students purchase their own copies. The department's recently-acquired ICT resources are used to good effect for teaching and for learning.

274 The vast majority of students have a very strong commitment to their studies, and clearly want to learn and improve. They participate well in discussions, and work very co-operatively in groups. As a result, they make very good progress.

275 The very good leadership and management of the department ensure that an ethos of hard work is maintained. The staff work well together as a team and have a strong commitment to raising attainment for all students, and especially for those who have the potential to reach the top grades.

## Geography

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

### Strengths

- Attainment is above average and students make good progress.
- Planning and marking are excellent and teachers have high expectations of students.
- Students have very positive attitudes.
- The subject is very well led and managed.

### Areas for improvement

- Greater opportunity for fieldwork and the use of ICT.

276 The overall standard of work is above average. GCE A2 level examination results in 2002 were very high with six of the seven candidates gaining the highest, A, grade, which reflects the very good quality of teaching. Students achieved better results in this subject than in most of their other subjects and made good progress. Results in the AS-level examination taken at the end of Year 12 are above average. Teachers analyse the examination results carefully and have implemented clear strategies to improve standards still further, including a focus on coursework and examination techniques.

277 Students in Year 12 have an above average knowledge of the subject. They have a good understanding of how the lives of people vary across the world. One group, for

instance, understood how the quality of life may be measured and successfully identified, and compared the variations in the quality of life in different parts of the city of Lima in Peru. They have above average knowledge of the complex relationships between people and the environment, and how the effects of people on the environment may be lessened. In one lesson, for example, students suggested appropriate ways in which damaged environments in the Peak District National Park could be managed.

278 Overall, students in Year 13 continue to make good progress and have an above average knowledge and understanding of the subject. They clearly understand the changes that take place in landscapes and the occurrence of natural hazards. One group, for example, used good knowledge of the reasons for avalanches to accurately predict where they may occur. Higher attaining students use geographical models confidently to emphasise changes in cities, and they effectively explain how changes in the natural landscape such as coasts might be managed. All students have an above average knowledge of examples which illustrate the topics they have studied.

279 Throughout students extract information from resource material accurately, swiftly and efficiently, and they use the information they collect effectively to reach sensible conclusions. Students have a good grasp of geographical terms and the majority use them accurately. Written work is of a good standard. Students make worthwhile oral contributions to lessons. They have good skills in investigative work, in collecting and analysing data, drawing appropriate conclusions, and evaluating the methods they have used. The quality of their note-taking is satisfactory and files are maintained in very good order.

280 The quality of teaching, overall, is very good and some is excellent. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject and the standards required by the course. They provide well-structured explanations, which gain students' interest, and well-considered exercises to improve students' examination techniques, particularly in essay writing. Lesson planning is excellent. A review of earlier work with a brisk 'starter' activity is followed by a carefully planned series of exercises. These fully involve students in purposeful work to provide information, reinforce ideas, and develop a deeper understanding of the topic. In one lesson, for instance, students assessed the causes of erosion in a mountain area. After a rapid review of previous work they quickly assessed the problem from a well-chosen photograph, used a series of detailed information cards to gain knowledge of different possible causes, and, following discussion, decided which was the most likely reason. Finally they suggested sensible ways to manage the problem they had recognised following further research in their own time.

281 Teachers have very high expectations and set high standards for students. They rigorously review essay work, and regularly check notebooks, so students work diligently to achieve the highest standards, attend lessons promptly and regularly, and make good progress. Work is pitched at an appropriate level. Students work hard, assimilate information quickly and are very productive as lessons proceed at a very brisk pace. Relationships are excellent and students work effectively with each other, and are encouraged to work independently and to evaluate their progress. Consequently, a purposeful, industrious working atmosphere is established; students complete work on time, and know clearly what they need to do to improve. They have a very positive attitude to the subject, are confident in their own learning and are very complimentary about the support they receive.

282 The scheme of work is very carefully planned, building effectively on work students have covered in previous years. There is one good opportunity for fieldwork but this is insufficient to fully extend the range of students' understanding and skills, and not enough opportunities are provided for the purposeful use of ICT. The procedures for assessing students' progress and providing advice and support are very good and provide well-focused

information on how individual students may raise their standards. Resources are of good quality but students in Year 12 do not have a personal textbook to support their private study. Staffing is excellent as the subject is taught by a team of four well-qualified specialist teachers. The subject is very well led and managed and there is a clear sense of direction based on close monitoring of teaching, marking, and students' work. There is a commitment and capacity to improve standards still further.

### Religious education

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

#### Strengths

- A very clear sense of direction is set by the new subject leader.
- No teaching is less than good and teaching is often excellent.
- There is a very good match between the needs of the curriculum and present staffing.
- The commitment to improvement and the capacity to succeed are high.

#### Area for improvement

- Recent AS results have been well below the national average.

283 In the sixth form, students follow a programme of religious education provided through the enrichment programme of general studies. Students also have the benefit of an annual day conference on religion and ethics. Students may also choose to do the GCE A-level course in religious studies. In the last two years, results AS have been well below the national average and some students intend to repeat their AS papers in order to improve their A-level grades. In 2002 some candidates failed to achieve an AS grade and none achieved grades A or B. After two years without candidates the college entered three candidates for A-level in 2002. Although no candidates achieved grades A or B their results were much better than at AS and above the national average.

284 The standard of work seen during the inspection indicates that present AS and A-level students are at a standard in line with the national average. In their study of ethics, students in Year 12 use specialist vocabulary correctly but the skills of evaluation and analysis are less evident. In Year 13 in ethics students are clearly at A-level standard with the prospect of a more typical range of grades, including grades A and B. In Year 13 in the other unit of study students show not only the expected knowledge and understanding of Hinduism but also the expected skills of evaluation and analysis. These students think and speak in a disciplined way and some show the capacity to achieve the highest grades. They learn well and make very good progress because they are very positive in attitude and have a high level of maturity.

285 Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have the specialist knowledge and the ability to develop students' skills. As a consequence students not only learn well in lessons but also feel confident that they will do themselves justice in the examination. Teachers plan their lessons carefully with clear objectives. The level of challenge and expectation is both high and achievable. Teachers use methods that enable students to make rapid progress. Teachers also make very good use of the time available and not a moment is wasted. Students analyse scripts from previous examinations and by identifying the candidates' strengths and weaknesses they learn how to improve their own performance. Teachers use homework very well to reinforce and extend work done in class. Students make great intellectual effort and so acquire the theoretical framework and the understanding of fundamental concepts they need. They know what they are doing and they know what to do to improve.

286 The general programme of religious education provided for students in the sixth form meets the requirements of the agreed syllabus. The units studied for the GCE examination are broad and balanced but the relevance of Hinduism may not be immediately obvious to potential students and may be subject to review. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The college provides AS and A-level courses and these look ready to become more successful and to attract more students. The college appointed the present subject leader last September and the new leadership ensures very clear educational direction. It is in the sixth form that commitment to improvement and the capacity to succeed are at their highest. There is a very good match between the needs of the curriculum and present staffing. As a consequence no teaching is less than good and often teaching is excellent.

## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus was on English and modern foreign languages.

### English

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

#### Strengths

- Learning is very good, students make very good progress and standards are improving.
- Teaching is very good because teachers share their very good subject knowledge and inspire students to make their finest efforts.
- Teachers give time, energy and expertise generously to ensure their students' success.
- The teaching is very well led and very good relationships encourage shared learning.

#### Areas for improvement

- Standards in AS and A2 examinations need improving to reflect the good learning in lessons.
- Students need to develop independent research skills and their own personal styles of writing.

287 Results in AS and A-level examinations for 2002 were broadly in line with national averages and better than at the time of the last inspection. Many more students choose to study English literature and retention rates are high from AS to A-level level. Students build on their previous learning by developing their skills in critical analysis, reading and evaluating texts and writing well-structured essays. Standards of work seen in lessons were average overall but with clear indications from the written work available that students will achieve well in 2003. For example, some Year 13 students wrote good quality essays comparing the treatment of the theme of war by the contemporary novelist Sebastian Faulks with the stark realism in the poems of Wilfred Owen who wrote as an active soldier serving in the First World War. The quality of learning is very good as a result of the opportunities provided by teachers for discussion and debate on authors and their work. However, not all students match their good understanding of the texts with good writing because many are trapped in a clumsy, colloquial style that does not serve their purpose well.

288 Teaching is very good because students are steered skilfully towards well-structured evaluation of the text supported by carefully chosen quotations to consolidate their arguments and match assessment objectives. As a result students' writing is improving although more practice at writing timed essays is needed. Students in Year 12 analyse the ways in which writers use form, structure and language to convey their message, identifying the impact on their audiences, for example the reaction of medieval society to the Wife of Bath's views on

marriage in Chaucer's *Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales*. In discussion with the inspector, students spoke appreciatively of their teachers' critical guidance and support for their learning.

289 The dedicated subject leader manages his team of committed teachers with skill and sensitivity; as one student said, "They inspire us to do our best."

### Modern foreign languages

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

#### Strengths

- Teaching is good. Teachers have good subject knowledge for work at this level.
- Assessment procedures are good, leading to improvements in learning.
- Students have very good attitudes to the subject and work very hard.
- Relationships between students and with their teachers are very good.

#### Areas for improvement

- The number of students who chose to study languages in the sixth form.
- The quality of students' written work.

290 The number of entries for AS and A-level GCE is small and it is unreliable to make statistical comparisons against national averages. In 2002 the one student who entered did not pass.

291 Numbers who choose to study languages in the sixth form are small, but are steadily rising over time. Students in Year 12 are studying German at Uxbridge College of Further Education and those in Year 13 are studying French. Evidence seen in lessons and in students' files suggests that standards at the end of Year 12 and Year 13 are average for the course. Male and female students do equally well and achievement is good in relation to performance at GCSE. Students can understand the gist of authentic spoken and written French and can select important details from it. Inspection evidence indicates that the quality of spoken language is in line with course expectations and students are confident speakers. Students in Year 13, for example, can discuss issues such as the problems of immigration in France and the rise of the National Front. The quality of students' written work is more variable. Students work hard and write at length about such topics as the Basque Country and nuclear energy but their work is often not accurate enough in terms of grammar to reach higher grades in A-level. This is partly the legacy of a lack of regular, structured opportunities for higher attaining students to develop extended writing styles in Years 7 to 11.

292 The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers prepare lessons carefully and ensure that relevant and up-to-date material is available for lessons. Teachers have good subject knowledge, both of the level of spoken work required and of the technicalities of grammar needed to prepare for examinations. Students are given plenty of helpful prompts to aid their preparation. Students' work is regularly marked and corrected, and teachers make good use of marking to give them helpful advice on how to improve their work. Regular assessments give students a good indication of what stage they are at and what their future grades are likely to be. There is a relaxed and businesslike atmosphere in lessons, and very good relationships between students and with their teachers are a strong feature of the subject. Students are very attentive and show a high level of motivation to improve. They develop good individual and research skills and work very hard. Students speak warmly of the level of help and advice that is available from teachers when they need it and this is a significant factor in the progress they make.

293 The management of the subject is very good. There are clear policies in place and the scheme of work provides a progressive programme across the two years of the course. Teachers and students work hard together and show a high level of mutual respect. The subject has made good progress since the previous inspection.