

INSPECTION REPORT

BIDEFORD COLLEGE

Bideford, Devon

LEA area: Devon

Unique reference number: 113516

Headteacher: Mr B Love

Reporting inspector: Mrs R Tong
2552

Dates of inspection: 28 February – 3 March 2000

Inspection number: 187541

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of students: 11 to 18

Gender of students: Mixed

School address: Abbotsham Road
Bideford
North Devon

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Appropriate authority: Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr David Rowe

Date of previous inspection: 18 March 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
R Tong	Registered inspector	Equal opportunities	What sort of college is it? How high are standards (2.1)? How well is the college led and managed? What should the college do to improve further?
A Smith	Lay inspector		How high are standards (2.2)? How well does the college care for its students? How well does the college work in partnership with parents?
I Farquhar	Team inspector	Mathematics	
R Samways	Team inspector	English	
L Lindsay-Clift	Team inspector	Science	
V Marriott	Team inspector	Design and technology	
M Graham	Team inspector	Information technology	
I Randall	Team inspector	History	
M Hillary	Team inspector	Geography	
T Hill	Team inspector	Art Special educational needs English as an additional language	
C Holland	Team inspector	Music	
J Laver	Team inspector	Physical education	
G Langtree	Team inspector	Religious education	
M Higgins	Team inspector	Modern languages	
J Tirrell	Team inspector	GNVQ	
A Stillman	Team inspector		
T Ferris	Team inspector	Sixth form	How well are students taught? How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7 - 12
Information about the college	
How good the college is	
What the college does well	
What could be improved	
How the college has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Students' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the college	
How well the college is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the college	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	13
The college's results and achievements	
Students' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?	15
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO STUDENTS?	18
HOW WELL DOES THE COLLEGE CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?	21
HOW WELL DOES THE COLLEGE WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?	22
HOW WELL IS THE COLLEGE LED AND MANAGED?	23
WHAT SHOULD THE COLLEGE DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	25
PART C: COLLEGE DATA AND INDICATORS	27
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	32

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE

Bideford College is a very large community college for boys and girls from the age of 11 – 18, with a special unit for students with hearing impairment. The college is maintained by Devon local education authority. There are 1,801 students on roll, with 242 in the Sixth Form. There are more boys than girls in some year groups and a significantly greater number of girls in Year 12. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly in line with the national average. The ethnic mix of students is predominantly white, with very few students from ethnic minority backgrounds. Only a very small number of students have English as an additional language and none is in the early stages of acquiring English. The attainment of students on entry to the college is just below average. The full ability range is present, but there is a slightly larger than average proportion of students with special educational needs. These needs are wide ranging and include learning and emotional and behavioural difficulties, and there are eight students with hearing impairment.

HOW GOOD THE COLLEGE IS

Bideford College provides an acceptable standard of education for its students. There are strengths in some aspects of its work, but there are many areas which need improvement. Although many Sixth Form students make good progress, students in the main part of the college do not achieve as well as they should. Standards in many subjects and results in the National Curriculum tests are about average at the end of Key Stage 3 but General Certificate of Education (GCSE) results are below average at Key Stage 4. Although there is much good teaching, the teaching is unsatisfactory overall and this is the main reason why students are not reaching high enough standards. The college is successful in promoting the personal development of its students and there is a friendly atmosphere. However, the leadership of the college has not been successful in raising standards and improving teaching and the college does not give satisfactory value for money.

What the college does well

- Many students in the Sixth Form make good progress, particularly in history and art.
- Students with special educational needs make good progress at Key Stage 3.
- The provision for students with hearing impairment is good.
- The moral development of students is effective.
- Students make good progress in science at Key Stage 4 and physical education (PE) at Key Stage 3.
- Textiles work is good throughout the college.
- There are very good opportunities for music, drama, sport and other outdoor activities.

What could be improved

- Standards and achievement in Key Stages 3 and 4 are not as high as they could be, particularly in mathematics, modern foreign languages, information technology (IT) and history.
- The quality of teaching needs to be improved and become more consistent.
- The leadership and management of the college should establish a shared commitment throughout the college to higher standards.
- The curriculum should be improved to meet statutory requirements in information technology at Key Stages 3 and 4 and religious education (RE) at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form.
- The monitoring and evaluation of the college's performance needs to be systematic and thorough.
- The assessment of students' work should be improved.
- Financial planning should be more detailed, based on more accurate projections and synchronised with curriculum planning.
- The management of health and safety should be more rigorous.

Bideford College has serious weaknesses. Its strengths are counterbalanced by its weaknesses. The areas for improvement outlined above will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE COLLEGE HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The college was last inspected in April 1996 and, although there has been progress in some aspects of its work since that time, there has not been sufficient improvement overall. There has been a modest improvement in Key Stage 3 and post-16 performance, but a decline in Key Stage 4 results in 1999. The college has improved some of the issues identified at the time of the last inspection. The departmental development plans are now closely tied to the college plan and there is a regular programme of review. The appearance of the college and its accommodation have been improved and there is a plan for further development. The staff are more aware of the need to match work to students' needs and develop their basic skills, but there are still weaknesses in practice. The curriculum still does not fully meet statutory requirements and assessment, target setting and the use of homework need further improvement. The college still does not provide a daily act of collective worship and there are further matters of health and safety which need to be addressed.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
Key Stage 3	D	C	C	C
GCSE examinations	D	D	E	E
A-levels/AS-levels	E	E	D	

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

Results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in English, mathematics and science show a trend of improvement similar to the national trend and the college's results are now in line with all schools nationally and with similar schools. Taking an average for each subject, mathematics is weaker than English and science when compared to similar schools. The achievement of girls is below average in science and in English.

At GCSE the college's results dropped in 1999 and are below the average for all schools nationally and well below results achieved by similar schools. The overall trend of results has been below the national trend. Results for both boys and girls have been consistently below the national average, but girls' results dropped in 1999 and are well below average. Results are below average in mathematics, history, modern foreign languages, and resistant materials. They are above average in food, music and textiles.

There has been a trend of improvement in post-16 results over the last three years, but the college's results are below the national average. There are very good results in A-level history. In the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) advanced level in business studies, results were above the national average in 1999. However, in the intermediate level GNVQ courses, the completion rate was well below the national average.

Some groups of students achieve well and make good progress. Students with special educational needs make good progress in Key Stage 3 and many students in the Sixth Form are making good progress, taking account of their levels of attainment when they start their courses. Overall, however, students do not achieve as well as they should.

The college has set modest targets for improvement in results at Key Stage 4 to bring them closer to, although not reaching, current national averages in the percentage achieving five or more A* - C grades.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the college	Most students are generally positive about college.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is generally satisfactory. The college is orderly and students are courteous and friendly. However, the behaviour of a small minority of students is unsatisfactory.

Personal development and relationships	The personal development of students is effective and relationships between students are good.
Attendance	Attendance was satisfactory last year, but in the first half of the spring term 2000 attendance at Key Stage 4 was unsatisfactory.

The atmosphere of the college is harmonious. Pupils develop maturity and respond well to the opportunities provided. The attendance of girls at Key Stage 4 in the first half of the spring term was well below the national average.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Good

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

Most of the teaching is of a satisfactory standard and many lessons are good or very good. During the inspection, the teaching in 84 per cent of lessons was judged satisfactory or better. Teaching was judged to be very good or excellent in 16 per cent of lessons and unsatisfactory or poor in 16 per cent. However, there is a significant difference between teaching in the Sixth Form, which is good, and that in the main part of the school. Teaching is not satisfactory in almost one lesson in five at Key Stages 3 and 4 and this means that too many students are not working as productively as they should or at an appropriate pace. Overall, therefore, teaching is judged as being unsatisfactory in the main school. Too often students are not challenged intellectually and are not aware of how well they are doing. Good teaching in the Sixth Form ensures that most students are making good progress after GCSE. Students with special needs are well supported in their learning. They make good progress in Key Stage 3 and sound progress thereafter.

The quality of teaching at Key Stages 3 and 4 is good in science, satisfactory in English but unsatisfactory in mathematics. The teaching of literacy skills is sound, but the teaching of numeracy is unsatisfactory.

Teaching is strongest in art, where it is very good at all key stages, and in physical education. The teaching of food and textiles, music at Key Stage 4 and history in the Sixth Form are also strengths. Teaching is unsatisfactory overall in modern language and information technology, and in history at Key Stage 4. Teaching generally meets the needs of all students, although the more able and those of average ability are often not stretched. Students concentrate well and work hard in response to effective teaching. In weaker lessons, they make less effort, their progress is slow and sometimes their behaviour is unsatisfactory.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE COLLEGE

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is satisfactory overall, although there are weaknesses in a number of areas, particularly in IT and in RE in the Sixth Form. There are very good opportunities for students in music, drama, sport and other outdoor activities.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Provision is generally good despite the fact that Individual Education Plans are not yet fully in place. The Hearing Impaired Unit makes very good provision for its students.
Provision for students' personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	There is limited provision for spiritual development and this is unsatisfactory. Provision for social and cultural development is satisfactory, and provision for moral development is good.
How well the college cares for its students	The pastoral system offers good support for the students' personal development but the assessment of their work and monitoring and support of their academic progress are not satisfactory.

The curriculum is mainly broad and balanced, with a good range of courses on offer in the Sixth Form. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities catering for a wide range of interests. The provision for IT in Key Stages 3 and 4 does not meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. There are plans to increase the overall teaching time, which currently falls short of the minimum recommended. There is not enough time allowed for music in Key Stage 3, for example, and for RE in Key Stage 4. There is no provision of RE in the Sixth Form. The college puts a strong emphasis on moral development and heads of year and tutors play an important part in caring for the students. However, the assessment of students' work is not sufficiently well developed to support their progress. There is a good policy but it is not yet fully implemented and the information students receive does not give them enough detail about what they have achieved or how to improve.

HOW WELL THE COLLEGE IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Successful in setting a good atmosphere, but unsatisfactory overall because it is not yet making a sufficient impact on improving the quality of teaching and raising standards.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors support the college but have not monitored its work closely enough.
The college's evaluation of its performance	This is unsatisfactory. Procedures for monitoring and the approach to evaluation are not sufficiently systematic or rigorous.
The strategic use of resources	The strategic planning for the use of resources is weak and financial control is unsatisfactory.

The need to raise standards has been identified as a priority, but the leadership has not yet established throughout the college community a wholehearted commitment to high achievement. Monitoring and evaluation are weak at all levels and the governors have not been effective in holding the college to account. Poor planning and unsatisfactory systems of financial control have led to a large budget deficit, which the college has successfully reduced but is still working to pay off.

Staffing is adequate in some areas, but is adversely affected by a significant number of long term absences. Accommodation is unsatisfactory, in spite of improvements since the last inspection, but the quality and quantity of learning resources is adequate.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE COLLEGE

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The friendly and approachable atmosphere of the college. • The attitudes and values which students develop. • The range of extra-curricular activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality and consistency of homework set. • The information they receive about the work their children are doing. • Behaviour in the college. • The closeness of the partnership with parents.

The inspectors endorse parents' positive views. The college is friendly and welcoming, with a good atmosphere and courteous students, who become mature and responsible. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities.

Inspectors agree that there are inconsistencies in homework. There are examples of good use of homework but there are also times when the homework timetable is not kept to and tasks set do not extend the students' learning. In the questionnaire, although not at the meeting, a significant number of parents tended to think that behaviour in the college is not good and that they are not well informed about how well their children are doing. Many also tended to the view that the college does not work closely with parents. Inspectors found some justification for these views. Most students behave well, but some do not and there is scope for improvement. Parents are kept reasonably well informed about the work their children are doing, but receive little detailed information about the curriculum. They also have limited information on the standards their children are reaching during Key Stage 3, or what they need to do to improve their work. The college has joined the Investors in Parents scheme to develop a closer relationship with parents.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The college's results and achievements

1. Students' attainment on entry to the college is just below average. The standardised tests which the college administers when students enter show that attainment is just below average overall. At the end of Key Stage 2, students have reached standards in English, mathematics and science that are close to the national average, with girls' achievement falling further below average than that of boys.

2. By the time students reach the end of Key Stage 3 their attainment is broadly in line with that of all schools and schools nationally who take students from similar backgrounds. Taking the average level achieved, attainment in English and science is in line with the average for similar schools, although attainment in mathematics is below. The percentage of students gaining level 5 (the nationally expected level) is in line with all schools and with similar schools nationally in all three subjects. There is a higher percentage of students than in similar schools attaining level 6 or above in science, but a lower percentage than the national average and similar schools attaining level 6 in English. In mathematics, the proportion of students gaining these higher grades is similar to that nationally and in similar schools.

3. There is a trend of improvement in results, broadly in line with the national trend. Taking all three subjects, the performance of boys is just below the average for boys, but that of girls is well below average. Boys are close to the average in all three subjects. Girls are close to average in mathematics, but below average in science and English.

4. In the 1999 GCSE results the college was below the average nationally and well below the average for similar schools in the percentage of students gaining five or more A* - C grades, five or more A* - G grades and in the average total points score. In the percentage of students gaining five or more higher grades (A* - C) the college has been consistently below average for five years, but fell even further below in 1999. There had been a trend of improvement in the average total points score and in the percentage reaching five or more A* - G grades between the last inspection and 1998, but the 1999 results were further below the national levels than they had been over the last three years. Nearly all students, including those with special educational needs, gain at least one GCSE. On this statistic, the college's performance is in line with all schools and similar schools nationally.

5. In English, the percentage of students reaching A* - C grades is in line with national averages overall and with similar schools. Boys' results compare favourably with the national average for boys, but the performance of girls is well below average for girls. In mathematics, the percentage of students reaching higher grades is below the national average and the average for similar schools, and again, girls are further below than boys. Boys' results have improved and are close to average. In science, the percentage of students gaining two higher grades is in line with the average and with similar schools.

6. Boys' performance overall has been consistently below the national average for boys and dropped further in 1999. Girls have also been consistently below the national average for girls. There was a significant drop in 1999 and their performance fell well below the average for girls.

7. Results are good in textiles, music and food but below average in mathematics, history, modern foreign languages and resistant materials.

8. In post-16 examinations there has been a trend of improvement since 1997, both in the results of those entered for less than 2 A-levels or AS equivalent and those entered for two or more. However, the college's results are below the national average and over three years have been well below the national average. Exceptionally, results in history are very good. In the GNVQ A-level business studies course, results were above the national average in 1999. In the range of intermediate courses, the rate of completion is well below the national average.

9. The college has set targets in those areas legally required. The targets for the percentage of students gaining 5 or more A* – C grades are modest, bringing performance closer to, although not reaching, national average figures. Until 1998 the college was meeting its targets, but fell short in 1999. There has been no detailed analysis of data leading to more sharply focused targets in areas of weakness, for example, in the performance of girls.

10. The work seen in lessons and in the scrutiny of students' books shows standards which are in line with the standards expected nationally in most subjects at Key Stage 3, with the exception of mathematics, modern languages, IT and history, where they are below. At Key Stage 4, in addition to the subjects listed above, standards are also below expectations in RE. Standards in German are well below expectations in both key stages. Standards of literacy are in line with expectations at both key stages, but numeracy standards are below expectations at Key Stage 3. There are few areas of strength, but standards are high in textiles and in PE in Key Stage 3. In the Sixth Form standards are generally good. They are very good in art and history and good in mathematics but they are still below expectations in modern languages in both French and German.

11. Standards are not as high as they should be and students' achievement is not consistent. It varies between different groups of students, between subjects and from year to year. The most significant factor affecting students' progress and achievement is the quality of teaching they experience. Overall progress through Key Stage 3 is just satisfactory, but too often students are not challenged to work to their capacity. This lack of challenge extends to Key Stage 4 where achievement is unsatisfactory and students make less good progress here than in similar schools. The teachers often do not expect enough of the students and the tasks they set do not help students to extend their understanding or to reach high standards.

12. There are several areas where achievement is good, such as science, where most students make good progress and results at Key Stage 4 are higher than those of similar schools. Even here, however, the most and least able students are achieving better rates of progress than those of average ability. In Key Stages 3 and 4 achievement is also generally good in art and in physical education but is not satisfactory in mathematics, modern languages and IT, and in history at Key Stage 4. This inconsistency points to underachievement and a significant number of students are marking time.

13. Achievement in the Sixth Form is at least satisfactory in all subjects, and good in English, mathematics and science, and very good in art and history. Students generally make good progress in their post-16 courses. Many of them start from modest levels of attainment at the end of their GCSE courses and work hard and progress well as they go through the Sixth Form. They have limited opportunity to develop their skills in IT, but otherwise make sound progress in developing their key skills.

14. Students with special educational needs make good progress in most of their subjects at Key Stage 3 and reasonable progress at Key Stage 4. Gifted and talented students also make reasonable progress.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

15. Most students are content to come to the college and a significant number show keen interest in the many extra-curricular activities provided, such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, sporting activities and the college orchestra. Attitudes to learning are generally satisfactory and, in lessons where teaching is good or better, these have a positive impact on students' achievement. Many students show enjoyment and enthusiasm for their work and in many lessons the majority settle down to work conscientiously and stay on task.

16. Many students display good standards of behaviour both in lessons and around the college, but the attitudes and behaviour of a significant number are, at best, only satisfactory. As noted during the previous inspection, the college spreads over two main sites and this makes it difficult to supervise students effectively at all times. There is a high number of fixed term exclusions, and, although the reasons for these are appropriate, the high numbers involved reflect the difficulties some students experience in fitting into the expectations of college life. Incidents of bullying or other unsociable behaviour are rare and when they occur they are dealt with quickly and effectively.

17. Relationships are good and contribute greatly to the friendly ethos of the college. Students are open and friendly, and are often helpful and courteous to each other, staff and visitors. In lessons many students demonstrate a willingness to co-operate with the teacher and each other. These positive relationships are a key factor in enabling some good examples of collaborative work in both lessons and other activities. Most students develop mature and responsible attitudes. Their involvement in extra-curricular activities makes a good contribution to their personal development and many students join in sporting events and fund-raising activities and are active in the local community in a number of ways. Many students gain rewards for personal development through 'Discipline for Learning'. They also take an active interest in the College Council and help teachers and other staff around the college. Hearing impaired students play a full part in college life.

18. Attendance is satisfactory overall but less good than at the time of the last inspection. During the last reporting year, the college figures were broadly in line with the national average, but unauthorised absence was higher than average. The college works hard to monitor attendance and has become more rigorous in the way it authorises absence. This has contributed to the higher rate of absence which is not authorised. In the period immediately preceding this inspection attendance was found to be unsatisfactory. The college's analysis of attendance data, going back over many months, shows a consistent trend for attendance at Key Stage 4 that is below the national average. Girls' attendance in Year 11 is significantly lower than boys. Most lessons start on time and arrangements for discouraging internal truancy are adequate.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

19. During the inspection, 84 per cent of all lessons seen were judged to be satisfactory or better; 50 per cent to be good or better; and 16 per cent to be very good or excellent. At Key Stage 3, 20 per cent of the teaching was judged to be less than satisfactory; at Key Stage 4, 19 per cent; in the Sixth Form no unsatisfactory teaching was seen. In the main college, the teaching is better in Years 7 and 11 than in the other years. Overall, the best teaching is in Year 13.

20. The good teaching in the Sixth Form has been maintained since the time of the last inspection, but the overall quality of teaching in the main school is not as good as that described in the previous report and there is less good teaching in Key Stage 3.

21. Most of the teaching is now of a satisfactory standard and many lessons are good or better. However, the fact that the teaching in around 20 per cent of lessons in Key Stages 3 and 4 is unsatisfactory means that too many students are not working as productively as they should be or at an appropriate pace. Too often, they are not challenged intellectually and are unaware of how well they are doing. Overall, the teaching is unsatisfactory in the main college. In the Sixth Form, good teaching means that many students make at least satisfactory progress after GCSE.

22. The subjects in which the teaching is strongest are science, art and physical education. The teaching of food and textiles, music at Key Stage 4 and in history in the Sixth Form are also strengths. In most of the lessons in these subjects and generally in the Sixth Form, the teachers' good subject knowledge, their appropriate expectations of the students' behaviour and the good level of intellectual challenge all contribute to the students working productively and acquiring knowledge and skills at a good rate.

23. In the best lessons the students concentrate and participate well and have a secure grasp of how well they are doing. For example, in a Year 13 English literature lesson, the teacher achieved a very good balance between sharing knowledge and stimulating the students' thinking. This enabled them to express their enjoyment of the poetry they were reading and to develop very good knowledge and understanding of both imagery and other key aspects of poetic language. In an art lesson in Year 9, the teacher's very good demonstration of techniques of using wire and pliers and his ability to stimulate the thinking of individuals and groups led to the students making very good progress in designing and making head-dresses. In a mathematics lesson taught to lower attaining students in Year 8, the teacher showed very good skills in explaining and questioning and in attention to technical language. This enabled the students to make very good progress in calculating time on the 24-hour clock and in comparing and explaining different ways of telling the time. In a PE lesson in Year 11, the teacher created a relaxed but purposeful atmosphere and gave the students the responsibility of developing their own routines. The students responded very well to the progressive levels of difficulty that the teacher introduced, developing a variety of aerobic exercises and understanding the effects of these on health and fitness.

24. The subjects in which the teaching is weakest are modern languages, mathematics, information technology, and history at Key Stage 4. In too many lessons in modern languages the teachers' planning is poor, the objectives for the students' learning are too vague and the activities are either too difficult or, more often, do not require the students to think. As a result, the quality of the students' learning suffers, many lose motivation and results at GCSE are unsatisfactory. In mathematics, weaknesses in approximately a quarter of the lessons seen (and mainly at Key Stage 3) hold back the progress of the students. In these lessons the teachers' expectations are too low, the pace is too slow and the teachers do not use their time well. In information technology, the main weakness is the lack of secure knowledge of, and competence in, the subject. As a result, when information technology is used the teachers' low expectations lead to standards that are well below average and to a pace of learning that is too slow. An exception to this is in geography where the students often extend their skills. In history, low expectations hinder the students' acquisition of historical understanding and skills.

25. In the weaker lessons overall, the students' learning is characterised by a lack of intellectual effort, slow acquisition of knowledge and skills, unsatisfactory concentration and, at times, unsatisfactory behaviour. For example, in a mathematics lesson in Year 8, the teacher's inability to cope with constant interruptions by a minority of the students meant that the learning was fragmented and few gains were made by the end of the session. In a science lesson in Year 9 in which the students worked on computers to record changes of temperature in water, the teacher had not explained clearly to the students what they had to

do. Difficulties in managing the students led to frequent interruptions and occasional confrontation. By the end of the lesson very few of the students had achieved much and all were working well below their potential. In a Year 10 history lesson, the teacher's use of a textbook that many of the students found difficult to read led to most of the students spending most of the lesson copying text that they did not fully understand. They did so quietly and passively, but with no gains in either their interest in the topic (technological advances in coal-mining) or in their understanding of historical change. In a Year 11 revision lesson in German, the teacher did not explain adequately to the students how to approach the range of tasks available or how they could improve their performance. As a result, they acquired no new knowledge and made only very limited consolidation of previous learning. The teacher did not use time well, concentrating exclusively on three students and missing the opportunity to challenge them effectively. In a French lesson in Year 8, the teacher did not have clear objectives for the lesson and conducted the activities at too slow a pace and in a way that did not require the students to make any significant intellectual effort, for example, by immediately translating anything remotely "difficult" into English. As a result, the students lost interest, learnt little and were performing well below their potential.

26. One general weakness relates to the setting of homework. Evidence from both parents and students indicates that there is considerable inconsistency in the amount and timing of homework and that not all teachers keep to the published timetable. This causes difficulty for the students in organising their work, especially when short notice is given.

27. The assessment of students' work is also inconsistent. Many students receive little detailed feedback about their work and do not have a clear understanding of their standards. They often do not know the criteria against which they are judged. This inhibits their progress, because they do not have a clear idea of the levels they should be aiming for, or what to work on to improve.

28. The teaching of literacy to students with difficulty in reading and writing is satisfactory. Most make at least satisfactory progress as a result of working in small groups with additional support in Year 7 and of the in-class support they receive in Years 8 and 9. However, gains made by the students are not always sufficiently built on in other subjects. There is no consistent approach to the teaching of numeracy to those students with difficulties, either in mathematics or across the college. As a result many progress at a slower rate than they are capable of. Many experience difficulties in algebra, for example, because of weak grasp of number.

29. Teaching generally meets the needs of students with special educational needs and is most effective when the students are supported in class or withdrawn for intensive support.

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

30. The quality and range of the curriculum are satisfactory, but only just. There are strengths and some significant weaknesses at each key stage. This is broadly the same picture as described in the previous inspection report, although some changes have been made and timetabling has been improved.

31. There is good breadth in the curriculum that the college provides for its students in the main college. At Key Stage 3, all the students study drama and personal, social and health education in addition to the subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education. At some stage all study both French and German. At Key Stage 4, the students are able to choose from a good range of art and technology options, drama, sociology and business studies, in addition to the subjects provided in Years 7 to 9. More able students can study the three separate sciences. The college's procedures to ensure that individual students do not select an unbalanced programme are sufficiently robust and the college offers equality of opportunity for all students.

32. In the Sixth Form, the college provides a good range of subjects at A-level, currently seventeen in Year 12 and sixteen in Year 13. It provides a very good range of GNVQ courses at both intermediate and advanced level. Sixth Form students can study for GNVQ at either level in Business, Health and Social Care, Information Technology and Leisure and Tourism. Over a hundred do so; the college has clearly achieved parity of esteem for both traditional A-levels and vocational courses post-16.

33. The subjects in which the planning for, and provision of, a good range of activities and experiences are best are English, mathematics, science, art and physical education. In art, for example, students experience a good range of techniques and materials; good opportunities are provided to visit galleries and museums. In PE in the main college, but not in the Sixth Form, the college provides a good range of traditional games both in the taught curriculum and as extra-curricular activities, in addition to good provision for dance, gymnastics and outdoor and adventurous activities.

34. The college has established good community links that enhance the students' learning and experience. These are particularly good in the GNVQ courses. The quality of the links that the college has built with local businesses and other employers enables it to find placements for up to 300 students in its Key Stage 4 work experience programme. In 1999 the college was awarded the Investors in Business Partnership Diploma for the quality of its links. Good links with higher education institutions enable students to participate, for example, in science days at Cardiff and Plymouth Universities; staff from Exeter and Plymouth make good contributions to the Sixth Form programme that prepares students for higher education. The Smallpeice Trust currently sponsors four Year 12 students working on a design-based project with an electronics firm in Ilfracombe.

35. The college provides a very good range of extra-curricular activities. About a hundred students play in the college orchestra, which performs regularly in college and in the community. Other music ensembles include two groups of "African drummers", flute and clarinet groups, a soul band, rock bands and various singing groups. The "a cappella" group won first prize at a recent festival in Exeter. Over 200 students participate in the college's annual Christmas Festival of Music. In sport, there are regular fixtures against other colleges in netball, hockey, rugby, football, cricket, rounders and athletics. There are clubs for tennis, badminton, volleyball, dance and information technology, among others. Over 120 students participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme across a very wide range of activities.

36. The main weaknesses in the college's curriculum relate to a lack of teaching time overall and a shortage of time for some subjects. The relative lack of balance at each key stage contributes to the fact that statutory requirements are not met in two subjects, IT and RE.

37. The overall time for the curriculum, at just under 24 hours per week, does not meet the minimum recommendation. This was so at the time of the last inspection and is still so. Given that this includes some assemblies and that many students lose additional time when they have to get from one end to the other of the large college site between lessons means that time in the classroom is considerably below that in many other secondary schools. The college has appropriate plans to rectify this from September 2000. The subjects that suffer the most from this are music in Key Stage 3 and, to a lesser extent, history and geography in Year 9. The effect of this is greatest in music where the lack of time means that the students receive insufficient practice in composing. In religious education at Key Stage 4 the students receive, on average, only twenty minutes per week. As a result, the curricular requirements of the Locally Agreed Syllabus are simply not met.

38. The college provides intensive literacy support for weaker students in Key Stage 3 and strategies for the development of literacy are generally satisfactory. However, provision for the development of numeracy is not satisfactory because these skills are not given sufficient attention across the curriculum.

39. In the Sixth Form there is currently no programme of "enrichment" activities. Some Sixth Formers participate on a voluntary basis in games sessions and some are involved in the Young Enterprise Scheme. Year 12 students spend two periods a week supporting lessons with younger students. Beyond that, only a small number participate in community service or work experience. For most, their experience focuses more narrowly than in the vast majority of school sixth forms on their examination courses.

40. A relatively undemanding entry policy for Sixth Form courses in the past has led to a higher than average percentage of students failing to complete their GNVQ courses and a slightly above average failure rate in A-level.

41. Provision for IT is unsatisfactory and the requirement to teach the full National Curriculum is not met. The strategy of teaching IT through subjects at both Key Stages 3 and 4 does not work as the experience of individual students depends too much on the level of interest and expertise of their teachers. The contribution that subjects could make is not planned in a structured, coherent way. There is little planning to enable students to reach the higher levels of performance in IT. As a result of all the above, standards are not high enough.

42. The college has started to make provision for work-related education at Key Stage 4. One small group of around twenty students follows a well-planned and well-taught programme that they enjoy and which contributes well to their overall experience. There are, however, no accredited work-related courses and the overall curriculum at Key Stage 4 does not fully meet the needs of all the students. This is undoubtedly a factor in the unsatisfactory attendance of some, particularly girls.

43. The provision made for personal, social and health education, including sex education, is sound. There is appropriate attention to drug misuse. However, there are weaknesses in the provision for careers. The programme is taught by teachers who have not received sufficient training, and there is limited provision in the Sixth Form beyond preparation for higher education. The main strength is in the well-prepared work experience

programme for Year 10 and there is the potential for significant improvement to the provision of careers education and guidance in the future.

44. The provision for students with special educational needs is good at Key Stage 3 with an additional recovery programme for basic English and mathematics. Provision is satisfactory at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form.

45. The provision for students with hearing impairment is good. The large majority of teaching is by way of inclusion in mainstream classes. Here the individual students are supported by a trained and experienced support assistant working with the class teacher as a communication and learning support. A few students are withdrawn from modern foreign languages classes for extra support in preparing for GCSE examinations in other subjects. The work of the Unit enables students with hearing impairment to have access to the National Curriculum in a mainstream setting and to attain at levels in line with their ability in all subject areas. The Unit runs a weekly 'signing club' for staff and students of the college. This is a well thought out provision, which recognises the importance for hearing impaired students of both social and academic inclusion in the life of the college. The students play a full part in college activities and are accepted readily by all mainstream staff and students. Two profoundly deaf students have recently signed the words of songs for an audience at the National Music for Youth Festival. They will shortly be signing at the Devon Proms. One profoundly deaf student plays in the college rugby team.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

46. The college makes satisfactory provision for students' personal development and there has been little change since the time of the last inspection. Provision for moral development is good. In science and geography students consider the importance of saving energy and caring for the environment. In physical education students are encouraged to demonstrate fair play and show fairness in team games. Religious education makes a good contribution to students' moral development. For example, Key Stage 4 students discuss important ethical issues such as abortion and euthanasia with maturity and sensitivity.

47. Provision for students' social development is satisfactory. There are opportunities for students to work together and to contribute to the college community, for example, through the College Council. Students and staff organise a range of charitable events and demonstrate support to the wider community; for example, during the inspection students were keen to contribute to a college based appeal for the people of Mozambique.

48. Provision for cultural development is satisfactory. In mathematics students are encouraged to consider the importance of number in non-western traditions and the English curriculum includes poetry and stories from a range of cultures and traditions. Work in textiles explores different cultures and the art curriculum, through visits and in depth studies of artists, enhances students' cultural awareness. The college has recently developed a policy for multi-cultural education but this has yet to have a significant impact in a number of subject areas.

49. Provision for spiritual development is unsatisfactory. In religious education students are given the opportunity to consider important questions, such as creation, life after death and the existence of God, but there are few opportunities elsewhere in the planned curriculum for students to consider their own feelings and ideas. Well-planned and effective assemblies include acts of worship but the college is still not meeting statutory requirements. Assemblies contribute significantly to students' moral and social development; for example, a Year 7 assembly encouraged students to think about their hopes and aspirations and in

Year 11 students were encouraged to think about the morality of the Holocaust. However, opportunities for students to reflect personally on the issues raised in acts of worship are very limited.

HOW WELL DOES THE COLLEGE CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

50. There are many aspects of support for students' welfare that make a positive contribution to educational standards. Arrangements to promote students' general well-being are satisfactory. Students are offered a range of opportunities to receive help and support for personal difficulties. Very good child protection procedures are in place. They are well documented and all staff monitor students known to be at risk or causing concern. Teaching staff and other care professionals working in the college, such as the Education Welfare Officer and the college nurse, have received relevant training and provide effective cover to deal with any incidents. When there is reason for concern, good liaison takes place between the vice-principal, heads of year, form tutors and the relevant outside agencies. On the spot medical attention is readily available.

51. There is a health and safety policy that is currently under review by the governors. However, a number of health and safety concerns emerged during inspection. The most significant of these was related to the legal requirement for authorised personnel to make annual checks of electrical appliances around the college. During inspection there was no evidence that these checks had taken place. An audit of all the college buildings has recently taken place to review fire prevention and fire drills are undertaken regularly with risk assessments. National phone-in help-line numbers and other useful information is displayed around the college.

52. Since the last inspection the disciplinary system 'Discipline for Learning' has been in use. Although this system has the potential to be effective, in practice it is not always used to best effect and not all teachers apply the system to the same standards and to the same degree of consistency. The system is not always successful in producing the desired outcomes so that the overall standard of behaviour during inspection was no better than satisfactory. However, the college has successful procedures for monitoring and eliminating oppressive behaviour and students feel that they work in an atmosphere that does not tolerate oppressive behaviour. There are a number of students for whom either the structure of normal college life or their current domestic circumstances present problems. Many of these students benefit from the Link Unit which is able to offer them the kind of support and encouragement that enables them to remain in, rather than out of, college. Although more detailed curriculum planning is required, the Link makes a valuable contribution to the diversity of provision and support that the college is able to offer students as most of these students are enabled to make a staged return into mainstream learning. Homework diaries are also used to record details on students' behaviour and are sometimes used as a good means of communication between parents and teachers.

53. The college is good at monitoring students' personal development. The system relies on tutors knowing their students well. This process is aided by the practice of students remaining with the same tutor group throughout their time in the college. Heads of Year also move through the college with their year group and together with form tutors they are usually able to keep a regular track of all aspects of students' development. The 'Discipline for Learning' is also used to track students' personal development through the recording of rewards and sanctions. There is good support for students with hearing impairment. At present there are no facilities for helping students with homework after college.

54. Procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance are good. Since the last inspection the college has changed to using a computerised system to record attendance, absence and punctuality, and this aids greatly the provision the college is able to make for

monitoring attendance. The college also makes good use of the information available through this system to analyse attendance patterns. Recording and subsequent storage of information meets statutory legal requirements. Formal registration is carried out at the beginning of morning and afternoon sessions and at the beginning of every lesson. Form tutors follow up all cases of unauthorised attendance, and Heads of Year are kept informed. There is good liaison between the on-site Education Welfare Officer, other agencies and senior staff to ensure that all cases of poor attendance are investigated and followed up with appropriate actions in an effort to improve the current levels of attendance. The college has recently become involved in a pilot scheme to become 'Investors in Parents' to involve parents more actively in helping to raise levels of attendance and improve punctuality.

55. The college has developed a clear policy on raising attainment through assessment, recording and reporting, with an appropriate focus on the standards students are achieving. This is not yet fully implemented and current practice is inconsistent and is not contributing effectively to higher standards. Although many teachers mark work conscientiously, they do not give students enough information to help them to improve. At Key Stage 3, they do not relate assessment closely enough to the National Curriculum and some assessments at the end of the key stage are not accurate. In most curriculum areas, therefore, students are not clear about how well they are doing against the expectations of the National Curriculum and what they need to do to make further progress. Teachers are not effectively using information from assessment to plan the next steps in students' learning. There is no system for keeping an overview of students' progress across all their subjects. There has been some analysis of students' results and the college is beginning to use target setting but most students do not have a clear idea of their targets and there is still much to be done.

56. There are no Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in place for some students with special educational needs. Although most of their teachers are aware of their needs and plan work accordingly, there is no overview of the targets and progress of these students.

HOW WELL DOES THE COLLEGE WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

57. In line with the findings of the last inspection report, parents are generally supportive of the college and satisfied with the education provided for their children. Contact with parents prior to the inspection showed that parents appreciate the friendly and welcoming atmosphere and approve of the attitudes and values that they feel the college promotes. They particularly appreciate the extra-curricular activities on offer. Many parents also noted that they would like to see the quality and consistency of homework improved along with behaviour and the level of challenge for some students.

58. Most parents feel that parents' evenings are very useful and they feel generally informed about their child's progress, although many would like more information. Reports give helpful information to parents of children at Key Stage 4 about their current attainment and predicted GCSE grade. However, information about attainment at Key Stage 3 is much less clear because it is not related to the National Curriculum. In all reports there is not enough information and guidance about how students could improve their work. Reports also omit information on parents' rights to discuss the report with an appropriate teacher.

59. Parents are generally satisfied with the information they receive about the work of the college although many would like to know more about the work their children are doing. The quality and quantity of information the college provides for parents is satisfactory. Parents are provided with newsletters, letters on specific topics and GCSE curriculum information, but curriculum information is not provided for each year group at the start of the college year. These publications are complemented by opportunities for parents' evenings that are well-attended and for personal contact with tutors.

60. The governors' annual report and college prospectus both offer parents other useful information, but neither of these publications totally complies with statutory regulations. Omissions from the governors' report include the following: rates of students' authorised and unauthorised absence; a statement of progress in implementing the action plan drawn up following the last inspection; a description of the arrangements for the admission of students with difficulties; details of steps to prevent disabled students being treated less favourably than other students; details for facilities to assist access to the college by students with disabilities; a report on the implementation of the special needs policy. There is a reasonable home-college agreement, but no clear guidance is given as to how this may help parents to support the work of their children.

61. The Parent-Teacher Association helps parents to develop links with the college and there are plans, through the Investors in Parents Scheme, to involve parents more actively in their children's learning. Parents' evenings are well supported and make a contribution towards students' learning, both at college and home. Parents of children with a statement of special educational need receive appropriate information through an annual review and are invited to attend meetings to discuss progress. Various external professional agencies are actively involved in supporting the diverse range of special educational needs at the college. This support is extended to parents to enable willing parents to know where they too might offer support to their children's learning. Parents are very supportive of college productions and a number are very willing to help and join in with the outdoor educational activities, especially those involving walking and overnight camping. All these links between the college and parents make a sound contribution towards the students' learning at the college and at home.

HOW WELL IS THE COLLEGE LED AND MANAGED?

62. The principal and key staff set the friendly and approachable tone for the college and have gained the confidence of most parents and of the local community. Their leadership and management are slowly improving; some areas of poor performance are being tackled and the need to raise standards has become a clear priority for development. However, leadership and management are not satisfactory because they are not yet making a sufficient impact on improving the quality of teaching and promoting high standards. Some staff are fully committed to raising standards but this commitment is not consistent throughout. The college lacks an ethos of high achievement and there is no shared sense of purpose between staff.

63. Many staff with management responsibilities discharge aspects of their roles effectively. However, there has been a lack of systematic management training and some areas, particularly the monitoring and evaluation of teaching, remain weak. The management of health and safety is not satisfactory.

64. The governing body has a long-standing commitment to the college and a good range of expertise. It organises its business efficiently but it does not fulfil its statutory duties, nor monitor the work of the college with sufficient rigour. It has a general overview of strengths and weaknesses and contributes to the direction for the college with thrust for higher standards and a general commitment to improvement. However, it does not have a close enough knowledge or involvement to ensure that statutory requirements are met or that standards are as high as they should be. Statutory requirements are not being met in aspects of the curriculum, in health and safety and in the information which the college publishes.

65. The college analyses data about students' performance but is not yet making full use of the information available to pinpoint areas for development. There is no systematic monitoring of the quality of teaching and strategies for improving teaching and for raising

standards are not as well developed as they should be. Nevertheless, some aspects of development planning are improving. Appropriate priorities have been identified and the link between subject plans and the whole college plan is now considerably better than at the time of the last inspection. Progress is reviewed regularly and departments are encouraged to undertake self-evaluation, although the approach to this is not as rigorous as it should be.

Staffing

66. Most subjects are adequately staffed, but in a number of subject areas the quality of teaching and the continuity in students' learning are adversely affected by staff absence. The subjects affected include modern foreign languages, information technology, art, and drama. The college is taking steps to deal with this problem and has made some good temporary appointments. The procedures for the induction and support of new staff are very good. Plans for the professional development of teachers are related to college and subject development plans, but the needs of individual teachers are not systematically identified.

Accommodation

67. The quality of the college's accommodation is unsatisfactory, in spite of improvements since the last inspection. Although most subjects have adequate accommodation, three do not. The facilities for physical education, both indoors and outdoors, are inadequate. The sports field is poorly drained and as a result too often unusable because of waterlogging. The outdoor hard-playing surface is in need of repair. The sports hall and the small gymnasium do not provide sufficient indoor space for a college of this size. All of the above have an adverse effect on the quality of the students' experience of PE and, arguably, prevent standards from being as high as they could be with better facilities. A significant proportion of science lessons (15 per cent) is taught in non-specialist rooms. Half of the music lessons at Key Stage 3 are taught in a room that is too small. In both subjects these deficiencies have a negative effect on the students' learning, reducing access to scientific equipment in the one and making practical music activity difficult in the other. A plan is in place to bring about further improvement to the college accommodation.

Learning resources

68. The quality and quantity of learning resources are adequate. Almost all subjects have a satisfactory level of resources. There are, however, weaknesses in religious education, where the students' learning is held back by a poor range of resources, and in science in the Sixth Form where resources are insufficient for the large classes. A strength is the library. The quality and range of books are good. Most subjects use the library well to support specific topics. The library is well managed; it is particularly effective in encouraging the younger students to read widely. IT resources have been significantly improved since the time of the last inspection, but the ratio of computers to students does not reach the national average.

Financial management

69. There are weaknesses in the strategic use of resources. Financial planning and management, including budgetary control, have been poor, though there has been some recent improvement. At the end of the financial year 1997-98, the college had an end-of-year deficit of £30,000. By the end of the following year this had increased to £120,000, double the amount that had been forecast several months previously. A number of factors led to this situation, of which the most important was the overoptimistic forecast of the

number of students expected to enter the Sixth Form. A second important factor was the inadequate planning for contingencies in the course of the year. For 1999-2000 the governors set a budget designed to eliminate the deficit. Although significant savings have been made the latest prediction is a continuing overspend of £70,000. An immediate consequence of this was the “freezing” of subject spending. Although this in itself has not led to an inadequacy of resources, it has made teachers’ lesson planning more difficult, for example, by reducing the range of available photocopied materials.

70. Following a critical report by the local education authority on the college’s financial management, some improvements have been put in place. The governors’ finance committee now meets monthly and has taken a more challenging approach to the figures and assumptions presented by the college’s managers. A decision to reduce staffing has been made; the projection of the number of students to enter the Sixth Form is more realistic; and arrangements for the amount and release of contingency funds are much more strictly defined. A remaining and important weakness, however, is that curricular and financial planning are not sufficiently synchronised. For example, the possible impact of staffing reductions on the curriculum has not been thought through and the proposals for the revised Sixth Form curriculum, already communicated to potential Sixth Formers and their parents, have yet to be fully costed. The principles of best value are not rigorously applied.

WHAT SHOULD THE COLLEGE DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

71. In order to tackle the serious weaknesses, the senior staff and governors should:

- (1) raise standards and achievement, particularly in mathematics, modern foreign languages, information technology and history, by: setting challenging targets for the college as a whole, for each subject and for individual students; focusing on improving the results of girls; investing in the training and development of teachers in the subjects listed; and improving the monitoring of students’ academic progress (see paragraphs 2-6, 9-11, 86-89, 123, 124, 132-134, 140 and 141);
- (2) improve the quality of teaching to make it more consistent by: developing a systematic programme for monitoring and evaluating teaching; identifying key areas for improvement; establishing and implementing an improvement plan; sharing good practice; improving the use of homework and ensuring procedures for staff development meet the needs identified (see paragraphs 19-21, 24-27, 90-92, 127, 136-138 and 144);
- (3) establish a commitment to higher standards throughout the college by: challenging low expectations; involving all staff in regular professional discussions about standards and teaching quality; making these aspects of the college’s work high priority for improvement in all subjects; and continuing to improve the quality and effectiveness of subject development planning (see paragraphs 62-64);
- (4) ensure that the curriculum meets statutory requirements by: implementing plans to increase teaching time; ensuring that the National Curriculum requirements for information technology are met; and providing for RE in the Sixth Form (see paragraphs 36, 37, 41, 132-134, 165 and 171);
- (5) establish procedures for systematic and rigorous monitoring and evaluation of teaching, learning and standards, by: using performance data; developing the evaluation skills of middle managers; and ensuring that all managers monitor and evaluate the work of their teams (see paragraphs 63-65, 81, 93, 99 and

131);

- (6) improve the assessment of students' work by: fully implementing the college policy for assessment, recording and reporting; relating assessment to National Curriculum levels in Key Stage 3; and giving students detailed information about their work and how to improve it (see paragraphs 27 and 55);
- (7) improve financial planning by developing more detailed forecasting and costing curriculum proposals (see paragraphs 69 and 70);
- (8) improve the management of health and safety by ensuring that safety checks meet statutory requirements (see paragraph 51).

Other weaknesses, which are less serious but should be considered, are: ensure that the published information meets legal requirements (see paragraph 43); improve the quality of provision for students' spiritual development (see paragraph 49); ensure that IEPs are in place for students with special educational needs (see paragraph 56); improve the provision for careers education (see paragraph 43).

PART C: COLLEGE DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	222
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	39

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1	15	34	33	14	2	-

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

Information about the college's students

Students on the college's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the college's roll	1,559	240
Number of full-time students eligible for free college meals	322	

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	68	2
Number of students on the college's special educational needs register	343	10

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	4

Pupil mobility in the last college year	No of students
Students who joined the college other than at the usual time of first admission	82
Students who left the college other than at the usual time of leaving	72

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
College data	7.7
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
College data	1.5
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered students in final year of Key	Year	Boys	Girls	Total

Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	1999	152	160	312
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National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	87	95	83
	Girls	111	91	78
	Total	198	186	161
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	College	63 (63)	60 (54)	52 (50)
	National	63 (64)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	College	18 (34)	32 (28)	21 (19)
	National	28 (34)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	73	87	91
	Girls	106	87	90
	Total	179	174	181
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	College	57 (69)	56 (47)	58 (63)
	National	64 (62)	64 (63)	60 (62)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	College	24 (29)	30 (20)	30 (25)
	National	31 (31)	37(36)	28 (31)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	141	135	276

GCSE results		5 or more grades A*-C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	44	125	138
	Girls	43	114	127
	Total	87	239	265
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	College	32 (37)	86 (90)	95 (98)
	National	46 (45)	91 (90)	96 (95)

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

GCSE results		GCSE points score
Average points score per pupil	College	31 (34)

	National	38 (37)
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Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Attainment at the end of the Sixth Form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	33	47	80

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
College	13.0	12.8	12.9 (12.0)	2.9	4.4	3.7 (3.4)
National	17.7	18.1	17.9 (17.6)	2.7	2.8	2.8 (2.8)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	College	63	47
	National		73

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	1
Indian	1
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	2
White	1567
Any other minority ethnic group	7

Exclusions in the last college year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian	1	
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	43	3
Other minority ethnic groups		

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

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

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	107
Number of students per qualified teacher	16.8

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	26
Total aggregate hours worked per week	612

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	81.6
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	23
Key Stage 4	22

Financial information

Financial year	1998-1999
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	£
Total income	3,775,090
Total expenditure	3,864,335
Expenditure per pupil	2,242
Balance brought forward from previous year	-31,220
Balance carried forward to next year	-120,465

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

1,345

Number of questionnaires returned

454

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes college.	32	58	7	2	1
My child is making good progress in college.	35	56	6	2	2
Behaviour in the college is good.	19	51	14	5	12
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	14	54	23	7	3
The teaching is good.	16	62	10	1	10
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	22	51	20	5	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the college with questions or a problem.	41	46	9	2	2
The college expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	39	51	7	1	2
The college works closely with parents.	17	50	22	6	6
The college is well led and managed.	25	52	9	4	10
The college is helping my child become mature and responsible.	24	57	11	3	5
The college provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	29	49	9	4	9

There were no further issues raised by a significant number of parents at the meeting for parents or in letters and written comments.

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

ENGLISH

72. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is broadly in line with the national average and with the average for similar schools. This is reflected in National Curriculum tests, in teacher assessments, in the lessons observed and in the scrutiny of students' work. National test results have improved since the time of the last inspection. The 1999 results were close to the national average for the number of students gaining level 5 or above but were below average for those reaching the higher levels. The difference between boys' and girls' attainment is less marked than that found nationally but the performance of girls is below average by comparison with similar schools.

73. At Key Stage 4 the 1999 GCSE results in English and English literature are in line with the national average for students gaining A*-C grades in similar schools. Boys' results in English compare favourably with the national average but in English literature they are significantly below average. The performance of girls, however, in the 1999 examinations, was significantly below the national average in both English and English literature.

74. In lessons and in the scrutiny of work there is a similar picture, although there is no significant underachievement by girls. Students make reasonable progress in both Key Stages and achievement is sound.

75. A-level results in 1999 were below average in literature and in line with the national average in language for the percentage gaining A or B grades. In lessons and in the work seen the standards of attainment follow the same pattern but there is some very high attainment in Year 13, especially in some of the literary-critical essays and in the investigative work in language. Students are making good progress and achievement is generally good.

76. In oral work, achievement is good where students are able to work collaboratively to prepare and present their work to the class audience. Good examples range from Year 7 students explaining how they would react to winning a large sum of money and Year 8 groups investigating adjectival order to Years 12 and 13 students presenting complex literary and linguistic ideas to their peers.

77. Most students show a willingness to read for pleasure, taking advantage of opportunities to bring their own material or to make use of departmental book boxes. This is particularly evident in Key Stage 3 where the beginnings of many lessons provide quality time for individual private reading. Students read texts from different cultures and traditions as part of their GCSE work at Key Stage 4 and are given wider reading assignments with good opportunities to make individual choices, matched to their interests and aptitudes. A-level students go on to develop considerable knowledge and understanding as they read, analyse and interpret an increasingly demanding and stimulating range of texts.

78. Students are encouraged from the start of Key Stage 3 to improve their writing through drafting and proof-reading and to take note of teachers' marking. Whilst some teachers approach spelling, punctuation and syntax systematically there is a lack of consistent practice, so that students do not always improve their knowledge and writing skills as much as they should. Some of the best learning in these aspects of writing occurs when students are encouraged to investigate and describe how good writers create effects and then to apply the same techniques to their own writing. Year 8 students, for example, worked effectively on creating tension and climax having analysed how Westall achieved the effect in 'The Machine Gunners'. Much of the GCSE coursework shows how students

progress to develop their skills within a range of styles and forms, such as discursive, narrative, journalistic and personal. The quality of writing by A-level students is often of exceptional quality in both literary-critical essays and in the varied and investigative work demanded by the Language course. The English department makes very good use of its own computer room, enabling students to produce and publish an interesting range of leaflets, brochures and posters.

79. There are pockets of good practice in the development of literacy in a number of subjects. Students' writing skills are developed in aspects of work in the humanities, science, design and technology and art. A number of departments are highlighting technical and subject-specific vocabulary in classrooms and some teachers are beginning to make use of writing frames to support the learning of weaker students. Standards of reading are satisfactory in most subjects but there are weaknesses in modern foreign languages. The college library is effective in promoting reading and supporting the development of cross-curricular study skills. Year 7 students who on entry have not reached level 4 in English are given intensive support through the withdrawal programme and this is extended as necessary into Key Stage 3, largely through in-class support. Overall, these students make good progress.

80. The quality of teaching is sound overall and students often experience very good teaching in English lessons. Teaching is usually good or very good in the Sixth Form and frequently of this quality in the main college. However, this quality is not consistent and teaching is sometimes unsatisfactory at Key Stages 3 and 4. The best teaching is characterised by a combination of very good subject knowledge, well planned sequences of work, explicit sharing of learning objectives and assessment criteria and detailed and diagnostic marking. In lessons where these features are present both the quality of learning and progress and achievement are good. Students are challenged to think and are enabled to acquire new knowledge, develop ideas and increase their understanding. Where teaching is unsatisfactory the main weakness is in planning. Tasks are undemanding and there is little or no variation in teaching strategies, so students work at their own pace and many are marking time.

81. Many aspects of the leadership of the department are effective but the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning have yet to be embedded in the culture of the department and there is, as yet, no systematic use of data to inform target setting or curriculum planning. It is at this level that management and leadership needs to be improved so that the considerable strengths of the department may be more sharply focused on raising students' achievement and standards of attainment.

82. There is a range of good quality literature, including work by pre-twentieth century authors, Shakespeare and other major writers, but there is a need to improve the provision of recent and contemporary writing at Key Stage 3. The full potential of accessing and reading ICT texts has yet to be realised in the department's work.

83. Drama is a popular subject in the college. It is taught separately from English to all Key Stage 3 students and is an optional subject for GCSE and A-level. Standards in the GCSE examinations over the past three years have been significantly lower than the national average for students gaining A*-C grades and this is reflected in some of the work seen in the current Year 11. Recent A-level results have also been below average.

84. The quality of teaching in drama is satisfactory at Key Stage 4 and very good in the Sixth Form, where the teacher's subject knowledge is particularly well employed. In the lessons seen at Key Stage 3 the teaching is sometimes less secure because of some weaknesses in teachers' knowledge and understanding of drama strategies and conventions. Consequently the work is not always sufficiently demanding. The drama

department handbook contains detailed descriptions of available conventions for teaching, but students have limited knowledge and understanding of these. For example, in the Year 11 lesson seen, whilst they worked with commitment and enthusiasm on their group improvisations, students were limited in the range of conventions they were able to use to enhance the quality of their presentations.

85. The department makes very good use of its theatre facilities to mount a varied programme of public presentations and productions, many of which derive directly from classroom work. This aspect of the department's work, together with extra-curricular theatre visits, contributes significantly to students' cultural and social development and is a strength in the college.

MATHEMATICS

86. Standards of attainment are below national averages on entry to the college, with many students having a weak grasp of number. By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is close to the national average but below that in similar schools; boys do better than girls. Over the past three years, attainment has risen in line with national trends but is still barely satisfactory. At the end of Key Stage 4, the proportion of students achieving A*-G grades is in line with the national average. However, results in the A*-C range are consistently below those nationally and below those for similar schools. Over the past two years, girls' results have been significantly below those nationally, whilst boys' results have improved and are closer to national averages. Achievement in both key stages is not satisfactory. Students make insufficient progress and are not reaching high enough standards.

87. A-level results are good in the proportion of students gaining grades A and B. Students consistently obtain good grades in relation to national standards. Similarly, those students taking GNVQ courses are successful in obtaining satisfactory grades in Application of Number. Sixth form students make good progress during the course and levels of achievement are good.

88. In Years 7 and 8, the students' weak grasp of number hinders their progress in algebra. Many students are still insecure with numeracy despite the college's efforts to improve their basic skills. By the end of Key Stage 3, most are able to look for pattern in number and have achieved good investigative skills. A good example of successful application of skills was seen in Year 9, where students had to allocate people to a theatre seating plan. This entailed decision-making, calculation and strategic thinking. The large majority of students can collect and interpret data and they have developed a satisfactory grounding in the use of spreadsheets. The least able students and those with special educational needs make good progress, whilst the most able students have a sure grasp of mathematical techniques. However, progress is unsatisfactory with middle ability students.

89. By the end of Key Stage 4, most students have built on their investigative skills and can apply them to coursework with satisfactory results on the whole. They can also use mathematics in geography, design and technology, science and art to good effect. Again, the least able make good progress and the most able produce excellent coursework. A significant minority of middle ability students underachieve. A-level students are given a good grounding in mathematics and are well-equipped for higher education, particularly in their application of statistics. The GNVQ courses give a solid foundation to the application of number in the workplace.

90. Although the teaching of mathematics has strengths, it is unsatisfactory overall in the main school. The quality of teaching with the least able and most able students is good and sometimes very good. Students with special educational needs are given well-focused

teaching backed by high quality support from classroom assistants. The most able students benefit from the good subject knowledge of the teachers and the encouragement given. All staff develop good relations with their students, encourage learning and give sympathetic help to individuals. They explain work clearly and are patient with those who find mathematics difficult. However, at Key Stage 3, there is still uncertainty about how to develop basic numeracy, which results in an uncoordinated approach within the department. Also, the individualised learning approach in Years 7 and 8 is not used well. The pace of lessons is too slow and the progress of students is hindered.

91. At Key Stage 4, teachers do not use questions well enough to probe for understanding, promote discussion and engage students in their own learning. This means that students' misconceptions are frequently missed and they become reluctant to ask questions or seek help. Again this holds back progress. Sixth Form teaching is good: students are invited to discuss the problems, suggest solutions and are usually involved with the work throughout the lesson. At all stages, assessment is thorough and books are marked, although not all staff follow the agreed procedures. The assessment data is not always used effectively to plan the next steps in students' learning, nor to inform students of progress or how they can improve their work.

92. Students generally have a good attitude to learning and usually get on with their work. A few, however, are inclined to shout out answers and disrupt others. Where the teacher does not control this behaviour, the work of the class suffers.

93. Many aspects of the leadership and management of the department are good and there is clear curricular guidance. The curriculum provision is sound and gives all students access to a wide experience of mathematical ideas. However, the work of the department is not systematically monitored and evaluated. Particular attention should be given to strategies for raising the attainment of girls.

94. Since the last inspection, the department has introduced a numeracy strategy, developed computer work in mathematics, improved its rooming arrangements and focused on ways of improving student achievement. However, there is still much to be done.

SCIENCE

95. Results in the 1999 National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 were in line with the national average and with the average for students with similar backgrounds overall, but a larger proportion of students achieved the higher levels. There has been a steady improvement in National Curriculum test results during the last three years. At Key Stage 4 the percentage of students achieving at least two A* to C grades in sciences in 1999 was in line with the national averages and above the averages of students of similar backgrounds. Overall performance in sciences in 1999 was better than in most other subjects in the college. The percentage of A* to C grades shows a steady upward trend during the last three years. In the A-level examinations in 1999, achievement in biology and physics was just above the national average points scores, and in line with them in chemistry. Results improved from 1998 to 1999.

96. At the time of the last inspection, the standards at Key Stages 3 and 4 were below the national average. Given the attainment of the students on entry, overall achievement is now good. Currently the achievement of the most able students at the end of Key Stage 3 and of the most able students throughout Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form is particularly good. That of students with special educational needs is also good, relative to their capability. Good, and some very good, teaching and the positive attitudes of many students towards sciences contribute significantly to good achievement. Achievement in Year 7 is

only satisfactory; tasks are not consistently matched to students' abilities, and continuity of experience is hampered in classes which are split between two teachers.

97. The current standard of work of the students at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the Sixth Form is in line with the level expected for students at the relevant age. At Key Stage 3, the majority of students have a sound knowledge of the prescribed scientific facts; the higher attaining students are developing an understanding of scientific concepts, such as the principles behind physical and chemical changes. At Key Stage 4, the students consolidate and add to their knowledge and understanding. Higher attainers, for example, readily understand the atomic structure of the alkaline metals and how this relates to their properties; Hooke's Law and 'elastic limits'; and the measurement of osmotic pressures within living cells. In the Sixth Form, the majority of students are able to apply complex concepts. Throughout Key Stage 3 students are learning the skills of scientific investigation effectively. Investigative work is carried out proficiently by the higher attainers at Key Stage 4 and at Sixth Form level, and very good written reports are produced. Throughout the college students of all abilities make good use of graphs and charts. The higher attainers at Key Stage 4 are learning to apply mathematical principles to science, for example, calculating the molar strengths of solutions, using titration data. In the Sixth Form many apply mathematical concepts competently and confidently. The majority of the students produce satisfactory written work and are learning effectively to use and spell scientific vocabulary. The high attainers at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form produce notes and extended essays of good quality. Good use is made of information technology to support learning.

98. The teaching is good in Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the Sixth Form. Lessons are well planned and prepared. The teachers have good relationships with students and discipline is good in almost all lessons. The teachers' subject knowledge is very good and teachers give clear expositions, engage students' attention, and enable them quickly to gain scientific knowledge and understanding. In many lessons teachers set challenging tasks and work at an appropriate pace. These factors, combined with the manifest enthusiasm of many teachers, holds the interest of students and stimulates them to apply considerable intellectual effort to the work. In one very good lesson, on light and space, with Year 9 upper ability students, the teacher revised previous work by careful questioning with an emphasis on scientific vocabulary. The students responded positively, quickly recalling the facts. Focusing on how day and night and the seasons arise, he provided challenging tasks set out on good quality work sheets, with a computer program and appropriate text books for reference. The students were interested and willingly collaborated in groups; they teased out the answers by discussion and appropriate help from the teacher, and quickly gained a thorough understanding of the concepts. Characteristics of the teaching of the less able students include: a patient approach; imaginative ideas to hold students' attention; and continual reinforcement of factual learning. There is some unsatisfactory teaching in the occasional lesson at Key Stages 3 and 4. The main weaknesses are that students are not clear about what they should be learning and the discipline is inadequate.

99. The department is well led. There is a strong commitment to raising standards. Detailed analysis of national test and examination results is undertaken each year; trends in the data are sought and, when established, targets are set for future improvement. Strategies are then identified for achieving these improvements. The practice of setting targets for individual students, monitoring their progress and intervening in cases of perceived underachievement is becoming established at Key Stage 4. Formal routines for monitoring the on-going progress of individuals at Key Stage 3 and in the Sixth Form are not in place. There is insufficient sharing of assessment information between the three constituent departments and amongst teachers dealing with the same class. There is no formal monitoring of teaching, or of students' written work.

100. Since the last inspection there has been an improvement in standards at Key Stage 3, and substantial improvement at Key Stage 4. The provision and use of information technology have improved. There is insufficient specialist accommodation and some of it is still in poor condition, despite there having been some refurbishment since the last inspection. Furthermore, the accommodation is scattered. These factors lead to inefficiency, owing to equipment having to be moved considerable distances and teachers not having regular work bases. Students' practical work is restricted by the lack of laboratory space and insufficient technician support. There is insufficient equipment for large classes, particularly at Sixth Form level. At the time of the last inspection, a number of health and safety issues required attention; there are still several significant shortcomings in health and safety arrangements.

ART

101. Standards in art at the end of Key Stage 3 are in line with the level expected for this age group. Overall attainment in Year 7 is slightly below the level expected. Achievement in lessons is generally good and all students are making good progress.

102. The proportion of students gaining grades A*-C in GCSE examinations in 1999 was well below national averages and lower than all other subjects. There has been a marked deterioration in results over the past three years, especially in the performance of girls. Currently, very good teaching means that achievement in lessons is now good and students are working to their capacity and making progress.

103. The proportion of students gaining grades A-B in A- and A/S-level examinations in 1999 was well below national averages. In the previous two years the numbers taking A- and A/S-level were too small to make a fair judgement on what is nonetheless a decline overall. All students have gained a pass over the past three years. Again, the very good teaching which students are currently experiencing means that those now undertaking the A-level course are achieving good standards in relation to their standard at the start of the course.

104. Through Key Stage 3 students study the art of many cultures, including Mexican, African, Australasian and European. Higher attaining students rise to the challenge of lessons in observational drawing and create a series of quick life drawings from different viewpoints. Lower attaining students lack confidence and observational skill, tending to draw what they think they see. By the end of Key Stage 3 they are able to heat transfer their crayon drawings to fabric and build up individually interesting designs based on Australian aboriginal symbols, giving them a modern slant. Annotation is a requirement of art studies and the majority of students are able to sustain detailed notes on their work and biographical notes on artists. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection.

105. Higher attaining students at the end of Key Stage 4 use well developed basic skills to work on selected images from Surrealist painters, such as Dali and Magritte, adapting, developing and re-building them in a series of preparatory sketches for their GCSE coursework. From discussion and sketchbook evidence, it is clear that the students have learned a great deal about the construction, use and meaning of tribal masks. By post-16 their personal studies reveal considerable intellectual and creative effort being made to understand and utilise the influence of major artists, such as Cezanne, Hepworth, Matisse, O'Keefe and Arcimboldo. They build individual sketch and workbooks which reveal the depth and extent of their research and their enthusiasm for the subject. These reflect well the very good quality and high expectations of the teaching. In all key stages, students with special educational needs, including the able and talented, make good progress in their learning and practical achievements. Talented post-16 students make very good progress.

106. There have been recent changes to staffing in art and the quality of teaching which students currently experience is very good at all key stages. Teachers make good use of the working language of art, which students reflect back in discussion. This and the very good relationships and communication skills which teachers display in lessons accelerate the rate of progress of the students. The very well informed and wide ranging introduction to a sculpture lesson, coupled to the effective use of humour, extended the students' knowledge and understanding of both the classical work of Rodin and the figurative distortions of Giacometti and Moore. A well prepared lesson on Australian aboriginal art, using aboriginal music as a background, enriched the cultural input of the lesson. The use of an original didgeridoo, which the students were able to play, deepened the experience for them, although at times this tended to divert attention from the design aim of the lesson. Teachers plan very good closing sessions, in which students group around their work to recap on what they have learned. These sessions are not yet used effectively to develop the students' own critical awareness of their work.

107. There is now a strong sense of direction in the work of the department. This, together with the evidence of very good teaching and high achievement seen during the inspection week, indicates that the department is poised to make good progress in the years ahead. The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection, but this improvement is too recent to be reflected in improved examination results.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

108. Attainment reported in the 1999 Key Stage 3 Teacher Assessments is in line with national averages. In Key Stage 3, achievement in lessons is sound overall, but is not consistent and ranges from well above average to unsatisfactory. It is strong in food technology and textiles but unsatisfactory in resistant materials.

109. GCSE examination results have shown improvement since the last inspection, being slightly above national averages until 1999. In 1999 results in food and textiles rose further above average, particularly results for boys, whilst results in resistant materials were significantly below. Achievement in lessons reflects these results, being good in food and textiles, but unsatisfactory in resistant materials. Only one student took A-level in 1999, achieving Grade B. Achievement in lessons for the small number of Sixth Form students currently is satisfactory and standards are in line with expectations for the course.

110. In the majority of lessons students make satisfactory to good progress in developing their knowledge and understanding of a range of materials. They use tools and equipment safely and competently. Where they are given the opportunity, they demonstrate good levels of speaking and listening. They are confident when expressing their views and work very co-operatively in groups and pairs. Some very good examples of work in textiles and food technology show that these students are capable of attaining high levels in clarifying problems, researching, developing and communicating ideas and product evaluation. In construction lessons, the designing processes are not given appropriate emphasis and students are not reaching high enough standards. For example, in two Year 11 GCSE groups, one resistant materials and one graphic products, students were completing their designing retrospectively.

111. When given the opportunity, older students demonstrate high levels of creativity and independence as learners, accept responsibility for their learning and, as seen in textiles, have a very analytical and mature approach to designing and making high quality products. In the group tasks and discussions observed in food technology, students were able to define design criteria and evaluate products. In some lessons where students were making fuse testers or small boxes, their making skills were good but their designing was very limited and they had very weak understanding of its purpose. The level of graphical

presentation and drafting has improved since the last inspection.

112. The quality of teaching is sound overall, but it is not consistent throughout the department. It is best at Key Stage 3 where there is much good teaching and some that is outstanding in textiles and food technology. A large proportion of the teaching observed in both Key Stages 3 and 4 showed particular strengths in the way preparation and planning is organised and is linked to excellent use of learning resources. The teachers use a variety of strategies to foster the development of high quality research and evaluation skills. They ensure that there is a good pace to lessons by giving time limits, questioning students well and setting tasks that are appropriate for the students' ability. Discipline is good and students are well motivated. In food technology particularly, the skilful use of teaching strategies clearly improves learning. Teaching is unsatisfactory in a minority of lessons in Key Stage 3 and 4 because planning is not sufficiently thorough and the tasks set are not suitable. In these lessons, students do not make the progress they should. A consistent weakness in Key Stage 3 construction and electronics lessons is the cursory emphasis placed on teaching designing skills and processes, which is inhibiting students' progress. Assessment is inconsistent. In food, textiles and graphics it is used well and students have a good understanding of their progress. It is more variable in other areas. Support for students with special educational needs is very effective and they make good progress.

113. The department has made some progress since the last inspection, but much remains to be done to achieve consistently good teaching and high standards. The current development plan does not pay enough attention to improving teaching. The small amount of monitoring of teaching which has been undertaken has, thus far, had a limited impact on standards. The faculty has clear aims but these are not part of a shared view of design and technology that is subscribed to by all staff. This lack of a shared view is at the heart of the inconsistencies in the teaching of designing and is contributing to the variations evident in students' attainment and progress in the subject.

114. Consumable resources in the faculty are limited due to inadequate funding. This is resulting in the use of recycled materials, such as wood from industrial palettes, which are of an unacceptably poor quality. The current use of IT is well planned but some limitations are imposed by the capacity of the old computers available. The faculty will need to undertake further developments in IT in order to teach the National Curriculum from September 2000.

GEOGRAPHY

115. Standards are in line with national averages by the end of Key Stage 3. In some lower college lessons more able students make less progress than they might due to the lack of sufficiently high challenge. Students with special educational needs make reasonable progress and overall achievement is sound, with students currently in Year 9 reaching the nationally expected levels.

116. At GCSE standards are in line with the national average in the percentage of students gaining A*-C grades and achievement is sound. All students are making at least satisfactory progress, and for some less able students progress at GCSE is good. Results in GCSE rose sharply in 1999 due to closer monitoring and targeting of students on the C/D borderline.

117. A-level results are below the national average in the percentage of students gaining grades A and B and grades A to E. Given the prior attainment of the students at the start of the A-level course, these results usually represent sound and sometimes good levels of achievement and students are making good progress. Close supervision of students' work is also helping to raise standards at A-level.

118. Most students in Key Stage 3 are making sound progress. Year 7 are acquiring basic mapwork skills. Most can use four figure grid references and use scale and direction while more able students can correctly identify features of settlement on an Ordnance Survey map of the local area. Some more able students in Year 7 are clearly capable of moving at a faster pace, having already developed the skills and understanding required to complete the mapwork. Less able students are making sound progress; for example, in Year 8 they develop their understanding of events surrounding a natural disaster. More able students can write extended newspaper reports describing natural disasters and are keen to ask and answer questions. Some Year 8 students are also making good progress in the use of computers to assist their learning both in lessons and in a lunchtime club. Most Year 9 students were showing good understanding of the problems surrounding the movement of people from the countryside to cities in one lesson observed.

119. In Key Stage 4, more monitoring and closely focused teaching by the teachers has enabled less able and average ability students to make good progress, for example, in learning about the water cycle and the processes involved in river flooding. The students were making good use of computers in one Year 10 lesson and were able to produce appropriate graphs using a spreadsheet. Coursework materials are good and most students complete sound and sometimes good coursework projects in Year 11. These, together with other elements of coursework, help less able students achieve good results relative to their capability.

120. Students studying A-level are able to describe and explain complex environmental issues when given the chance to research at home and discuss the issues in the classroom. When they have the opportunity they show considerable maturity in their opinions, taking in to account a variety of views and opinions. Good coursework and fieldwork help students achieve good grades given their level on entry to the course.

121. Teaching in the subject is sound overall. Teachers have good up-to-date and relevant subject knowledge which they use to enhance students' knowledge and understanding. They also use current news events to illustrate aspects of the subject and motivate students' interest. The department has produced some very good teaching resources which include relevant maps, diagrams and questions. Where teaching is good or very good, teachers use a wide variety of methods and resources, including games, newspapers and computers, to engage the students' interest and motivate them. Students are involved by questioning and are able to ask their own questions and give their own views. Teaching is occasionally unsatisfactory in Key Stages 3 and 4, because the teachers do not involve students sufficiently, and this results in too much passive listening. At times the most able in Key Stage 3 are not stretched because there is a lack of challenge in the tasks set and not enough pace in their learning.

122. The department has made good progress since the last inspection and addressed all the key issues except for the range of work needed in some Key Stage 3 lessons to meet the needs of all students. Day-to-day management is good and there has been an appropriate focus on achievement at GCSE. The use of computers has been successfully integrated into the GCSE and A-level courses. Fieldwork is having a positive effect on standards. At present the monitoring of teaching is not systematic enough to rectify weaknesses in some areas of the department.

HISTORY

123. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are below national expectation. Students have good knowledge of people, events and situations, and the most able can relate events and changes to their causes and results. Although most students write fluently, in good detail, and present their work well, there is very little independent writing, but instead a great deal of

written work closely derived from textbooks or teachers' notes. Students can report the content of historical sources and detect their bias, but only a few can understand their implied messages. Students have very little experience of evaluating the significance of interpretations of history. The attainment in history of students on entry to the college is below average, and so, although students make progress, achievement is barely satisfactory and they do not reach the standards expected for their age group.

124. GCSE results were well below national average in 1999 in the percentage gaining A*-C grades, and in the preceding two years. The best standards are obtained by able boys, who also perform better in classwork than girls. Attainment seen in written work and in class is also below national expectation. Year 11 students write accurately and in great detail, but without discrimination. They imply their views in narrative or description rather than stating them clearly and supporting them from the evidence. Work with historical sources was a weakness at the last inspection, and remains so. Whereas almost all can detect bias in sources and can report what the sources tell them, only the most able have a clear strategy for evaluating the utility of sources and using them in the wider context. At Key Stage 4, the majority of students make progress mainly in the amount that they cover rather than in their understanding of historical situation and change. Their achievement is therefore unsatisfactory.

125. Standards at A-level are above national average, with a small cohort last year, but there have been no failures at A-level in the past three years and a high proportion of grades A-B. Year 13 students organise their work very well, writing well-reasoned essays showing a high level of subject knowledge. They have a good overview of the periods studied, with a clear understanding of the issues. Their discussion in class, particularly in English history, is well informed and thoughtful. Their document analysis is competent. They have good recall of historical facts to support their arguments. As a result of well-focused and effective teaching, students improve substantially on the levels suggested by their GCSE grades and their overall achievement is excellent.

126. Lower attaining students and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress throughout Key Stages 3 and 4, as they are given sufficient support and variety of experience to engage their interest and imagination. More able students at both key stages are insufficiently challenged to enable them to perform at the levels appropriate to their ability, and so their achievement is unsatisfactory. There is little difference in the attainment of boys and girls, except that the most successful students at GCSE and A-level are boys.

127. Teaching at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory but at Key Stage 4 it is unsatisfactory. There is some imaginative work in Year 9, but generally the teachers rarely make students aware of the purpose of an activity, and so they do not draw the attention of the students to skills that can be transferred and developed in different contexts. They impart large quantities of factual knowledge and explanation of events, talking at length with too few opportunities for students to contribute reasons from the given facts. Their explanations of tasks are often insufficiently clear, leaving students unsure of what is required. Teachers ask students to write at length, but do not guide them sufficiently in the development of argument backed by relevant facts. They demand the same level of reasoning at both key stages 3 and 4, with insufficient development of skills of reasoning and analysis. This means that the level of thinking that is appropriate for early Key Stage 3 is still being expected of GCSE students and expectations at Key Stage 4 are too low. All these factors inhibit students' learning and progress. Teachers provide appropriate tasks and resources to meet the needs of lower ability students, and work well in co-operation with support staff when they are present.

128. Since the last inspection consistent support for the college's discipline policy has brought about a good working atmosphere in lessons. Homework is set regularly, is relevant to the curriculum and builds on previous work. Marking, however, is inconsistent throughout

the department, with some teachers marking promptly and giving useful points for improvement, while other classes' work is rarely marked and students have little oral or written feedback on their performance.

129. Teaching of the Sixth Form is very good, with very good relationships between students and teachers resulting in a high level of debate in some lessons. Teachers focus on the requirements of the course, preparing students effectively for the demands of assessment and examinations. They structure lessons clearly, with challenging activities that involve students in using their knowledge to make mature decisions. The high standard of essay writing is a direct result of the teachers' clear guidance and supportive marking. Teachers use a wide variety of activities to ensure that students' interest and enthusiasm is maintained.

130. Students feel that they have to work very hard in history. They engage in discussion whenever they are given opportunities to do so, but are compliant in spending long periods writing or listening. A-level students enjoy the challenge of analytical discussion.

131. Relationships and co-operation among staff in the department are strong, with a high level of communication between staff. Although the head of department is aware of the strengths and weaknesses of her colleagues, there is insufficient formal monitoring of teaching and marking to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Staff have begun to plan tasks to match the ability range of the students, but have still not succeeded in challenging the more able. The curriculum is still narrow, with a need to give greater attention to the full range of evidence and communication skills. Teaching of key skills is beginning, with literacy planned into schemes of work. IT is beginning to be used but is not yet planned into the curriculum as an entitlement for all. Since the last inspection the time allocation for Years 7 and 8 has improved, but it is still insufficient at Year 9 to cover the curriculum. The department has therefore made some progress since the last inspection, but has still not succeeded in the key area of raising standards. In particular there has been insufficient progress in developing the full range of historical skills

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT)

132. At the end of Key Stage 3 standards are below the national expectation. In 1999, fewer than half the students were assessed by teachers as achieving the level expected for this age group in the end of key stage Teacher Assessments (a drop from almost 80 per cent in the previous year). Standards achieved by the students currently in Year 9 are often well below expectation but there are wide variations in standards depending on teaching and on access to resources at home and at college. Overall, students are not making sufficient progress and their achievement is unsatisfactory. Exceptions to this are some students with special educational needs who are well-supported, make good use of information technology and achieve well.

133. At GCSE there is no information technology course, no short course or certificate of achievement. Standards are below national expectations. Many students with access to information technology at home use computers to present their work but opportunities in college are more limited. The students currently in Year 11 have only irregular opportunities to use computers to enhance their learning. Their progress is therefore limited and their achievement is unsatisfactory.

134. There is no A-level course in information technology. Information technology provides some support for other subjects in the curriculum but standards overall in the Sixth Form are below expectation. Many students are unable to use information technology resources as effective tools to enhance their learning. A group of boys working towards both intermediate and advanced GNVQ courses in information technology are reaching standards

in line with expectations. The oldest students in this small group achieve good standards. They understand how information technology can assist them and use the available resources effectively. These students are interested and involved in their learning and make satisfactory progress.

135. Although standards are not as high as they should be, some teachers use information technology well to support learning in some classes, in some subjects. For example, in geography students use the Internet to explore rich resources about natural disasters. Students in a Year 10 geography class effectively completed a hydrograph of the River Torridge using data about rainfall and river flow. In Year 8 students use a desk-top publishing program to research, prepare and present leaflets about language. Students use a spreadsheet in mathematics and circuit building software in physics. In many of these situations students demonstrate appropriate levels of attainment. In other situations students frequently demonstrate a lack of appropriate skill. Too many students in too many classes are unable to perform basic tasks, such as logging on to the network, printing or saving their work.

136. At Key Stages 3 and 4 teaching with information technology is unsatisfactory overall. Occasionally it is very good, and the teacher makes good use of resources to enhance and extend learning. However, it varies too much between teachers and between subjects and is often unsatisfactory. This is sometimes due to a lack of training and sometimes to a lack of resources. Where there are no computers, or old computers, teaching with information technology is restricted. Where resources are plentiful, some, but by no means all, teachers make good and effective use of them. In these lessons, the teacher encourages students to explore the software and to share their experience, excitement and enthusiasm with the group. In too many lessons, the teacher fails to teach the appropriate information technology skills, holds students back and restricts their learning. In some lessons the teachers' own lack of ICT proficiency limits what students are allowed to do. In these instances pupil achievement is higher outside college than within it.

137. The quality of teaching on the GNVQ course is sound. Mixed teaching groups of Year 12 and Year 13, intermediate and advanced, are difficult to cater for, but the teaching is well organised and effective.

138. Despite some good teaching with information technology in some subjects, the overall picture is unsatisfactory and lacks coherence. There is no scheme of work to teach the Key Stage 3 information technology curriculum and no effective monitoring. This results in some students having only a very limited experience of the National Curriculum for information technology. Assessment at the end of Key Stage 3 is unsatisfactory. There is no planned coverage at Key Stage 4. In these respects the college is failing to meet statutory requirements.

139. There have been significant improvements to resources since the last inspection. A new network has been installed and there are new resources, for example, in the geography department. The college now has resources giving a ratio of 1:9 computers to students, slightly less good than the national picture (1:8). The network is very well managed and the skilled part time technicians effectively support teaching and learning throughout the college. In other respects there has been little progress since the last inspection. There is not yet a structure in place that allows the information technology programme of study to be taught or monitored effectively. There is a need, which the college is addressing, for teachers to receive further training.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

140. Standards in modern languages are below average throughout the college. In

German standards are well below average in Years 9 and 11. Results at GCSE are below the national average for French in the percentage gaining A* – C grades and well below the average for German. In the main college the great majority of students of all abilities are underachieving.

141. Results at A-level are below the national averages and have declined steadily over the last 3 years. In 1999, there was only one entry in each of German and Spanish, and that achieved a high grade. However, results in French were below average in the percentage of students gaining A and B and A – E grades. In the Sixth Form students often start at a low level but their progress and achievement throughout the course are at least satisfactory. Some students reach a good standard in their written work and are able to structure their writing and use a range of vocabulary. Skills in speaking and listening vary widely, but overall are about average.

142. In Years 10 and 11 students are learning to improve the accuracy of their writing. They produce quite lengthy pieces, for example, about the local area or their holidays, where they use a range of tenses and give quite detailed opinions. The writing is particularly fluent in some classes where students build up their ideas through oral work. For the majority of students throughout the college, speaking is the weakest skill. In most lessons there are insufficient opportunities for students to speak at length. They become over-reliant on written prompts. This prevents them from learning to speak naturally from memory.

143. Good teaching in the Sixth Form helps some students to develop their speaking at a later stage. In the main school, the most effective teaching has a brisk pace. For example, the Year 7 lesson where pupils were learning the French words for different animals started purposefully and engaged students' interest.

144. Overall, however, the quality of teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 is unsatisfactory and weaknesses in the teaching are the root cause of the underachievement in both French and German. In many lessons students achieve too little because the teacher is not clear about what should be learnt. Much of the teaching is pitched at too low a level for most of the class. Average and more able students often remain unchallenged. In a German lesson, for example, students repeated work from a topic on clothing covered earlier and quickly lost interest. The repetitive nature of the scheme of work leads many students to believe they are making no real progress. The students' disillusionment sometimes translates into poor attitudes and behaviour. They gradually lose confidence in their ability to learn a language as the weak teaching fails to develop skills or provide appropriate learning targets. A Year 11 French class was focused on the minimum requirements for the examination. Students listened to the teacher and copied out phrases with little opportunity to use language for themselves.

145. It is a major weakness in the management of the department that some of the key causes for underachievement have only recently been identified. There is no method of checking students' progress to identify weaknesses or on which to base help to improve. Since the last inspection some of the shortcomings in teaching have been addressed but much remains to be done. The commitment and drive highlighted in the last report still remain, but have only recently become focused on improving learning. The quality of display and extra-curricular provision remain high.

MUSIC

146. At the end of Key Stage 3 standards are broadly in line with national expectations and have improved since the previous inspection. Achievement is sound. Most students play keyboards and a variety of percussion instruments using a satisfactory technique and they sing confidently and in tune. Those who have instrumental lessons achieve higher

standards but there are a few students who play hesitantly and with some errors. Some ensembles with mixed instruments demonstrate a good degree of unity but ensemble work is less well developed in those classes that are not taught in specialist accommodation. In composing, students rearrange melodies and they understand how to use chords and bass lines. They work in different styles but their breadth of experience in this area is limited by lack of curriculum time. Limited resources in music technology also restrict students' opportunities in composing and most students do not develop skills in creating and storing their work using technology. In listening and appraising, students understand the musical elements and recognise techniques used in different periods and styles. Their use of musical terminology is not always accurate. A significant minority of students at this key stage do not receive specialist teaching and, for those students, standards are lower.

147. At Key Stage 4 standards have improved and in the past three years GCSE results have been very good and well above the national average in the percentage of students gaining A*-C. Most students make good progress and achieve well. In performance they achieve an appropriate standard in technique, musical understanding and level of difficulty of the music played. Those below the standard lack some security in performance or play music that is below the expected difficulty level. In composing, higher attaining students demonstrate good control of part writing, timbre, texture and structure. Lower attaining students control melody, harmony, rhythm and texture in line with national standards but development of ideas and structural balance in their work is weaker. Students make good use of music technology to develop their compositions. Knowledge and understanding is broadly in line with national standards. In Year 11 most students understand chord progressions and they can describe the significant features of the main historical periods using appropriate musical terminology. Aural recognition is weaker for some.

148. In the Sixth Form standards in the recent past have been poor with results well below the national average. Standards in the present cohort are better and more in line with national standards. Students are making satisfactory progress and achievement is sound. Performance is the main element of the chosen course at both A-level and AS-level and this is a strength for most students. Where there are weaknesses they are in aural dictation and essay writing.

149. Standards in the instrumental lessons are good and very good and numbers of students learning have increased since the last inspection.

150. Students usually behave well in their music lessons. They enjoy the practical work, co-operate with each other in paired keyboard performances and use the equipment sensibly. Most listen quietly to musical examples and they volunteer responses. Where accommodation makes it difficult for students to hear their own work they do not always stay on task and some indulge in background chatter.

151. At Key Stage 3 teaching is broadly satisfactory, but in those lessons taught by non-specialists lack of subject knowledge adversely affects the learning for those students. At Key Stage 4 teaching is good and at post-16 it is satisfactory. Most teachers have very good subject knowledge and they share their enthusiasm for the subject with their students. Lessons are planned around relevant subject matter that links the attainment targets and leads to better all round understanding of the topic. Explanations are mostly clear with questions directed to check understanding, although in some lessons more use of questioning is needed. There are good relationships between teachers and students and management of students is usually good. Students are encouraged in their tasks by praise and good support for individuals. There are extension tasks for higher attaining students but there is a need to develop more materials to support students with special educational needs to enable them to make the same progress as all the others. Expectations are mostly appropriate but, on occasion, more strategies are needed at post-16 to encourage students

to develop independent learning skills. Teaching in the instrumental lessons ranges from satisfactory to excellent.

152. The department has developed appropriate schemes of work and assessment strategies since the last inspection. Monitoring of standards is comprehensive at Key Stage 4 but is still being developed at Key Stage 3.

153. The department makes a notable contribution to the extra-curricular activities of the college and the standards achieved are strikingly good. A wide variety of musical ensembles rehearse and the numbers involved are impressive. Approximately 1:8 of the students are involved in musical activities with about a hundred students in the college orchestra. The music department makes an important contribution to the ethos of the college and students play in a variety of college concerts and local community events as well as county and national festivals. The orchestra is currently preparing for the Music for Youth festival.

154. Overall, standards have improved since the last inspection and numbers involved in music have increased. However, there is still insufficient curriculum time in Key Stage 3 and this is limiting the breadth of students' experience of music. Standards are adversely affected by non specialist teaching, by the unsuitable accommodation and lack of resources.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION (PE)

155. Physical education activities were observed at Key Stage 3 in football, gymnastics, aerobics and netball. Standards at the end of Year 9 are above the national expectations for this age group in the areas of performance, knowledge and understanding, and are therefore good. Activities in core physical education at Key Stage 4 were observed in basketball, trampolining, aerobics and the Junior Sports Leadership Award. Standards at Key Stage 4 are in line with those of similarly-aged students nationally, with a significant minority above, and standards are therefore satisfactory. Students make good progress and achieve well in both key stages. It was not possible to observe and evaluate the new GCSE course or recreational physical education in the Sixth Form.

156. Students enter Key Stage 3 with standards close to the expectations for similarly-aged students nationally. By the age of 14, at the end of Key Stage 3, they have developed their skills in football, in particular the ability to control, dribble and pass a ball with increasing accuracy, although lower-attaining students are less successful in transferring these skills consistently to a game. Girls improve their ability in netball to pass and receive a ball under pressure, whilst trying to dodge an opponent. Students develop good standards in gymnastics: many show a good ability to develop a series of movements on and off apparatus, and learn to hold balances with poise and control; whilst they show a good ability to develop a sequence of movements which they refine and evaluate in a mature manner. Standards in gymnastics are above expectations for students of a similar age nationally.

157. By the age of 16 students in Key Stage 4 develop skills, knowledge and understanding in a variety of sports. In basketball they develop passing skills, a knowledge of attack and defence strategies in a game situation, the ability to use space better, and the ability to shoot accurately from a jump and lay-up position. In trampolining, with the assistance of a qualified coach from outside college, students develop the ability to perform a variety of progressively more challenging bounces and jumps. In aerobics students not only perform, and sometimes devise, a series of exercises, but learn to evaluate the health-related benefits of exercise. Students making the extra commitment to study for the Junior Sports Leadership Award develop the confidence to prepare and carry out coaching sessions with much younger students.

158. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in their physical performance, knowledge and understanding at both Key Stages 3 and 4.

159. The quality of teaching is always at least satisfactory in Key Stage 3, and is good or very good in over two out of three lessons. In Key Stage 4, the teaching is always at least satisfactory, and is good or very good in one in two lessons. The teachers have good subject knowledge, which is clearly and expertly conveyed to students, giving them the confidence, for example, to develop challenging routines in gymnastics and trampolining. Activities are made progressively more challenging, as for example when Key Stage 3 students are given a range of shooting practices in football or students are devising gymnastic sequences. Students are motivated to meet the challenges, and high expectations of behaviour and performance are characteristic of several lessons. Students' attitudes towards physical education are very positive: most students respond to well-paced and challenging teaching, giving of their best and achieving good standards. Teachers frequently reinforce students' understanding of correct techniques and tactical awareness, often through good questioning, and they keep students on task, for example in netball, football and aerobics. Teachers also evaluate class progress with students before the end of lessons, giving them a sense of achievement. Particularly in gymnastics, teachers make students plan their activities and evaluate them. By giving students responsibility for their own learning in this way, teachers motivate them further. Relationships are good, and students enjoy learning in lessons in which the teaching is authoritative but relaxed.

160. On the very few occasions where aspects of teaching are less than satisfactory, teachers miss opportunities to develop students' knowledge and understanding, for example, by not giving older students opportunities to coach, evaluate or officiate in games. Also non-participants in lessons are sometimes given nothing constructive with which to occupy themselves, and so their time in long lessons is wasted.

161. The department is well led in most respects and this has a positive effect upon the raising of standards. For example, a detailed scheme of work assists teachers in planning good lessons. However, there is limited monitoring of teaching within the department, and so, although much of the teaching is good, there are limited opportunities to share the best practice. Accommodation is poor, both indoors and outdoors. The small gymnasium and sports hall have deteriorating floor surfaces and are cramped when large classes are being taught. Changing facilities are inadequate. The outdoor hard-play areas have deteriorating surfaces. Many of the playing fields are poorly-drained and are unsuitable for skills practices. The poor accommodation retards the progress in learning of some students. Key Stage 4 students are also disadvantaged by a relatively low time allocation for lessons, and there are limited opportunities to study physical education at GCSE level.

162. A strength of the physical education department and of the college as a whole is the provision of extra-curricular activities in sport, the result of high levels of commitment by several staff. Apart from regular clubs, there are fixtures in several sports against other colleges. Both teams and individuals are frequently successful, and many students gain representative honours on a regional or national basis in a wide variety of sports. The good take-up of these activities is a testament to the popularity of physical education with many students in the college.

163. In the last inspection standards in physical education were judged to be in line with national expectations or better, and the quality of teaching was sound or good. These high standards have been maintained, along with positive pupil attitudes and the good provision of extra-curricular activities. Other areas have been developed since the last inspection: assessment procedures and developmental planning have been improved. However, the hard-playing surfaces have not been upgraded.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (RE)

164. At the end of Key Stage 3 standards are in line with the expectations of the Devon Agreed Syllabus and achievement is satisfactory. Students can identify important beliefs and practices in Buddhism, Christianity and Sikhism. They use technical terms with accuracy, and through the good use of questions by teachers develop effective oral skills. The students can link their learning in religious education to their own ideas, experiences and values. For example, in a Year 8 lesson, students related the importance of the gurdwara in Sikhism to their own special places and considered what makes a place special. Students with special educational needs make good progress because of effective support from classroom assistants and clear, direct teaching which encourages their learning. The most able students are not reaching high enough standards because they are not sufficiently challenged in their learning, particularly in terms of their extended writing and developing their own views and ideas.

165. Standards achieved in general religious education at Key Stage 4 are below the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus and students' achievement is unsatisfactory over the course. This is because there is insufficient time to meet the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus. Students' progress and achievement in lessons is satisfactory and sometimes good. Students are able to discuss with maturity complex social issues such as abortion and euthanasia and can identify differing viewpoints. However, because of the very limited time available, students' own ideas are not developed with sufficient depth. There is little extended writing and students are unaware of religious viewpoints other than Christianity in relation to the issues covered. Students' skills of evaluation are not developed, again because of limited time. At GCSE, standards are above national averages. This is because of the commitment of staff to extra-curricular teaching sessions. In 1999 the results of girls were well above the national average in the percentage of higher grades, both in the full GCSE Religious Studies course and the short course in RE. Boys were below the national average but entry numbers for boys and girls are very small.

166. Students' attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory. Most students show good concentration and are eager to ask and answer questions. A small minority of boys at Key Stage 3 show a lack of interest in the subject and do not respect the views and ideas of others.

167. Students do well in religious education in terms of asking interesting questions and applying their learning to modern situations. A Year 7 lesson on Christianity enabled students to consider how selfless love could be applied to a modern day problem (flooding in Mozambique). At Key Stage 4 students' oral skills are often good. In a lesson on euthanasia, for example, students in a role play based on a court case made clear gains in their understanding of euthanasia as they discussed the issues with maturity and sensitivity.

168. The quality of teaching in religious education is satisfactory and often good at both Key Stages 3 and 4. In some lessons there is a good balance of whole-class, paired and group work. Teaching was particularly effective, for example, in a Key Stage 4 lesson on abortion which helped students learn through a good balance of whole-class teaching and group work on case studies related to abortion. Teaching is always at least satisfactory, but in some lessons it is less effective because introductions are too long and learning activities are not matched to the different abilities of the students.

169. The department has a clear and realistic development plan and is well organised. However, the absence of any monitoring in the department means that areas for development and progress are not effectively identified. Resources are poor and this inhibits learning, particularly for students with special needs in Key Stage 4.

170. Religious education makes a good contribution to students' spiritual development through considering important issues such as evil, suffering, life after death, origins of life and the existence of God. Moral development in religious education is very good. For example, in Year 9 students use their learning in Buddhism to consider how actions have consequences in their lives at home and at college.

171. The department has improved attainment in Key Stage 3 and the progress of students with special educational needs since the last inspection. It has also made progress in the use of homework. However, the lack of teaching time and failure to cover the Agreed Syllabus in full still has a detrimental impact on standards in Key Stage 4, and there is no provision for RE in the Sixth Form.

VOCATIONAL COURSES: GNVQ

172. In the Sixth Form, the college currently offers four GNVQ courses at both intermediate and advanced level – Business, Health and Social Care, Information Technology and Leisure and Tourism. The overall standard of attainment in all the current courses is satisfactory.

173. At intermediate level completion rates in 1999 appeared significantly below the national average. However, the national statistics are based on the number of students who complete after one year of study, but the college has an open recruitment policy and a curriculum structure which encourages students to work on intermediate courses over two years, in some cases to broaden A-level study.

174. At advanced level, the achievement of the first small group of students to complete the Business course was slightly above the national average.

175. Hearing impaired students are well integrated into the Health and Social Care course. They are achieving well and have taken part in the full range of activities associated with the course, including two periods of work experience. The specialist support staff, interpreting the teacher's words into sign language, make a significant contribution to this achievement.

176. Both the content and presentation of portfolio work are generally satisfactory, but would be enhanced by the wider use of ICT. Students have a sound understanding of the subject matter they are studying and can use appropriate technical language effectively, for example, in Health and Social Care when discussing the social support mechanisms available in the community.

177. The development of key skills and the planning and evaluation skills associated with grading are satisfactory. The progress students make through their course is also satisfactory in relation to their ability. For some weaker students, more variety and structure in the assessment activities would contribute to improving the quality of work and completion rates.

178. The response of students to all the GNVQ courses is good. Students are positive, motivated and have a mature attitude towards their study. They are well developed as independent learners and have a positive working relationship with each other and their teachers. They have a good understanding of the requirements of the GNVQ course they are following and are good at managing their own research, particularly when the learning builds on their own experiences or is linked to real business or community contexts.

179. The quality of teaching across the courses is good. The teachers involved are committed to GNVQ, have good subject knowledge and are experienced in the areas they

are teaching. Effective planning, the quality of the relationship between teachers and students, access to well resourced base rooms and good links with the local community all make a positive contribution to the quality of learning. The main weakness in the teaching is the over reliance on working from the assessment criteria. Students would benefit from more variety in the way assessment activities are presented and a greater emphasis on developing underpinning knowledge and understanding. The restricted access to information technology inhibits the application of this key skill and there is insufficient use of word processing to present portfolio evidence. Individual tutoring and advice to support students' learning is generally good. However, procedures on feedback and verification are inconsistent and lack of information to students about their work is inhibiting their learning.

180. The lack of a strategic policy for course development, combined with inappropriate curriculum structures, has led to inconsistencies in the quality of the learning opportunities provided for students. For example, across the different vocational areas there are wide variations in the blocking of timetabled time available for teaching. Some courses have a mix of different years and levels within a single group. There is insufficient monitoring of teaching and no systematic review of results to identify strategies for improvement.