

INSPECTION REPORT

BIDEFORD COLLEGE

Bideford

LEA area: Devon

Unique reference number: 113516

Headteacher: Mr R S Chant

Reporting inspector: Paul Cosway

2734

Dates of inspection: 11 – 15 February 2002

Inspection number: 222011

Full inspection carried out under Section 10 of the College Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE

Type of college:	Comprehensive
College category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
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Date of previous inspection:	February 2000

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12276	Terence Payne	<i>Team inspector</i>		Accommodation and resources.
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16786	Selwyn Hodge	<i>Team inspector</i>	Co-ordinator; Biology; Physics.	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE COLLEGE

The college is much bigger than the average comprehensive college, with 1814 pupils aged between 11 and 18. There are more girls (942) than boys (872). There is a total of 208 students in the Sixth Form, which is close to average in size. It offers a broad range of GCE A level and vocational courses. The college serves the small town of Bideford and a large rural area around it. The social and economic circumstances of the immediate area are below average for the country as a whole. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is broadly average. Difficulties with recruitment in recent years meant that there were problems filling staff vacancies in a number of departments. These problems are now almost entirely resolved.

Almost all the pupils are white, and the proportion of pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL) is low (0.5 per cent). The proportion of pupils with statements or on the register of special educational needs is above the national average. Of those with statements, a quarter has emotional or behavioural difficulties, a fifth has moderate learning difficulties and a fifth has specific learning difficulties. There is a special unit on site for hearing impaired pupils, with ten pupils on roll. The attainment of pupils is well below average on entry to the main college, and below average on entry to the Sixth Form.

HOW GOOD THE COLLEGE IS

The college is providing its pupils with a satisfactory standard of education. Pupils achieve well. Attainment is well below average on entry but it is higher in the Year 9 national tests, though still below the national average overall. In GCSE examinations, attainment is also below the national average, but in line with that in similar colleges. The quality of teaching is good overall. The college has a commitment to inclusiveness. It works hard to motivate pupils who are reluctant learners. There is some unsatisfactory behaviour in a minority of lessons, but the number of exclusions for poor behaviour is dropping. The Sixth Form is cost effective. The leadership and management of the college have improved and are now good. Senior managers provide clear direction and are now in a position to monitor the work of the college effectively. The college gives satisfactory value for money.

WHAT THE COLLEGE DOES WELL

- Pupils achieve well in some subjects in their GCSE examinations, especially in art, music, drama, textiles and physical education.
- Teaching is good overall and much improved since the last report.
- The college offers a broad range of courses and a wide range of clubs, visits and after-college activities to extend and enrich pupils' education.
- The provision for pupils' moral and social development is very good.
- The leadership and management of the college are good and subject departments are led effectively. There is a very clear direction for improvement from the leadership team, supported ably by the governing body.
- Teachers are well deployed and well qualified.
- Pupils' personal development is supported well.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- There is a minority of pupils whose attitudes and behaviour disturb the learning of others. The planned revisions to the behaviour policy need to be made and implemented.
- A minority of teachers does not have high enough expectations of their pupils, in part because assessment information is not always used to set appropriately challenging work for all.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning in a number of subject departments is unsatisfactory.
- There are significant weaknesses in the quality of accommodation.

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

HOW THE COLLEGE HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The college was last inspected in February 2000, when there were found to be serious weaknesses in the education it was providing for its pupils. Since that time, there has been satisfactory improvement. The college has improved its performance in GCSE examinations. The quality of teaching has also improved significantly. Twenty per cent of teaching for pupils between 11 and 16 was unsatisfactory. It is now just over five per cent. There has been an improvement in the use of assessment data to ensure that pupils are helped to make progress, though there is need for further improvement. The work of the college is being monitored with increasing effectiveness at a senior level, but there is not yet a consistently positive ethos in all classes.

Satisfactory progress has been made on most of the other key issues identified in the last report. Leadership and management, which were unsatisfactory, are now good and there is evidence that they are improving still further. Financial planning is more rigorous, and health and safety issues noted in the last report have been addressed. Some issues have not yet been resolved: the need to provide a daily act of collective worship for all and religious education in the Sixth Form. Overall, however, there has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection, and the college is well placed to continue to improve in future.

STANDARDS

The table below shows the standards achieved by pupils at the ages of 16 and 18, based on average point scores in GCSE and GCE A Level/AS Level examinations.

Performance in:	Compared with			
	all schools			Similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	E	D	D	C
A Levels/AS Levels	D	C	D	N/A

Key

Well above average A

Above average B

Average C

Below average D

Well below average E

Levels of attainment are satisfactory at the ages of 14 and 16 when the results are compared with schools that have similar pupils, but they are below average when compared with results across the country as a whole. At the age of 14, attainment in the national tests has been below the national average overall for the last two years. Over time, results in the national tests have improved broadly in line with the national trend.

At the end of Year 11, the proportion of pupils who attained five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C in 2001 was in line with the national average and that of similar schools. The proportions who attained five or more passes or one pass at A* to G was well below average, in comparison with national averages and similar schools. This was because ten per cent of 16 year olds were following work-related courses. Overall performance at GCSE was below average nationally, but average compared with similar schools.

The most successful subjects at GCSE in 2001 were music, science, textiles, drama, physical education and English literature. Less successful were German, French, business studies and art and design. The college exceeded the targets it set for itself in 2001. The inspection found that attainment has improved and is currently close to the national average, overall.

In the Sixth Form, students gained average results in 2000, but there was a dip in performance in 2001 when results were below the national average. Overall, students achieved satisfactorily. The best results in 2001 were in mathematics, geography, drama and fine art. Attainment was low in economics, design and technology, sociology and French. The inspection found that attainment is currently in line with the average nationally.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the college	Good: most pupils have positive attitudes to the college.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Satisfactory: most pupils behave appropriately in class and around the college. There is a small, but significant, minority whose conduct can affect the learning of others.
Personal development and relationships	Good: most pupils relate well to teachers and to one another. Most develop independence and learn to work co-operatively with others.
Attendance	Below average: the college works hard to improve attendance; the overall figures are close to the national average. Punctuality to lessons is sometimes a problem, partly because of the distances between buildings.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Across all the lessons seen, teaching was satisfactory or better in almost all lessons. Teaching was unsatisfactory in only 14 lessons observed out of a total of 240. Around a fifth of the teaching observed in the college was very good or excellent, with good teaching in over two fifths of lessons. In the Sixth Form, almost all the teaching observed was satisfactory or better. It was good in almost half the lessons observed, and very good or excellent in a third.

The teaching of English, mathematics and science is good overall in Years 7 to 11. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is satisfactory across the college. Teachers' good subject knowledge and good management of lessons are key strengths. The better lessons are brisk and focused on clear learning objectives, with high expectations of pupils' work rates and conduct. Pupils

develop good learning skills because of the good teaching and make good progress. However, in a minority of lessons, the unsatisfactory attitudes of a minority of pupils cause problems for teachers if they do not motivate them well. In these lessons, pupils do not always work hard enough to make satisfactory progress. Not all teachers have high enough expectations of their pupils.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE COLLEGE

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good: the curriculum is broad and reasonably well balanced. Not all of the programme of study for information and communication technology (ICT) is taught, however. For Years 7 to 11, the very good provision for extra-curricular clubs and activities provides good opportunities for pupils to broaden their education. There is a good range of GCE A Level courses and vocational courses in the Sixth Form. However, there is no religious education in the Sixth Form.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory: there is an inclusive education that meets the needs of most pupils. The provision for the hearing impaired is very good.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good: these pupils. Very good: they are identified and supported very well.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good: the provision for moral and social education is very good. The provision for cultural education is good, with strong contributions from music, drama, art and English. The provision for spiritual development has improved since the last report and is satisfactory. There is no daily act of collective worship for all pupils, however.
How well the college cares for its pupils	The educational and personal support and guidance for pupils are satisfactory overall. There are weaknesses in the use of assessment information to help pupils to progress, but these are being addressed. Personal support is good.

The college works satisfactorily in partnership with parents to help them to support their children's learning.

HOW WELL THE COLLEGE IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good leadership from the principal and vice principal, supported well by the new leadership team, has brought a very clear direction for future development and a strong commitment to raising standards. Most middle managers give good leadership, though some are not monitoring work in their areas well enough.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors fulfil their role well. They are involved in the work of the college, in deciding its future direction and in monitoring its work.
The college's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory: there is a good awareness of how to improve and the monitoring of teaching is developing. At a senior level, there is a clear understanding of how to use monitoring and assessment data.
The strategic use of resources	Good: the teachers are well qualified and deployed well. They make the best use they can of the unsatisfactory accommodation. Resources are satisfactory and used effectively. The college pays good attention to the principles of best value in all its purchasing decisions.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE COLLEGE

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<p>Most parents who responded are pleased with the college. Over 80 per cent of them:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • agree that expectations are high; • believe that their children make good progress; • would feel comfortable approaching the college with any problems; • believe that their children like coming to the college; • three quarters believe that teaching is good and that the college helps their children to become mature and responsible. 	<p>Of the parents who responded, around a third:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are not satisfied with the work that their children are set to do at home • would like the college to work more closely with them; • are concerned about behaviour in the college • would like more information about the progress their children are making.

The inspectors agree with the positive comments made by parents. Some parents are concerned about homework provision, but the inspection team was satisfied with the quality and quantity of homework being set. There are justified concerns about the behaviour in a small number of classes. The information that the college shares with parents about their children's progress is satisfactory. The reports are detailed and set targets.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The Sixth Form has 206 students and is close to average in size. Three fifths of students are female. Very few are from ethnic minority backgrounds, and none with EAL. Approximately six per cent of students are on the register for special educational needs, essentially due to medical disabilities, which is about average. More than half of all students are enrolled on GCE A Level courses; the remainder take Intermediate or Advanced Vocational courses.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is an effective Sixth Form. The overall provision is good and improving over time. Attainment at Advanced Level was below average last year, but is now close to average. It is above average in several subjects, such as art, music, history and the sciences. The majority of students achieve well, having entered with below average GCSE qualifications. Most go on to higher education. Students on vocational courses achieve adequately, but attainment is below the national average. Teaching is good and students show considerable commitment to their work. A wide range of courses is available, meeting the needs of the pupils. The Sixth Form is well led and cost effective.

STRENGTHS

- Provision of a wide range of A Level and Vocational courses to suit the aspirations of students.
- Standards are above average in art, drama, geography, history, music, physical education, psychology and textiles.
- Students achieve well in English and science subjects, and very well in art and drama.
- Teaching is good, with strong subject expertise and high expectations as notable features.
- Leadership is good, with clear vision and strategic planning for future development.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- Provision of enrichment activities, personal, social and health education (PSHE) and key skills courses.
- Quality of accommodation, especially facilities for private study and access to ICT resources.
- Procedures for monitoring and recording attendance.
- Provision and use of tutorial time.

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Satisfactory. Students are showing steady improvement in attainment from GCSE Level, as a result of committed teaching and new focus for leadership.
Biology	Good. Students achieve well and show positive attitudes. Very good teaching, especially in giving support, so students' knowledge develops well. Good co-ordination, but insufficient monitoring of student performance.
Physics	Good. Good consolidation of difficult concepts. Very effective teaching results in student confidence and knowledge being well developed. Good leadership.
Design and technology	Satisfactory. Students make satisfactory progress with practical skills and develop a firm understanding of design principles. Achievement in textiles is particularly good. Good relationships. Teaching is good, especially planning.
Business studies	Satisfactory. Attainment is average and students acquire a sound awareness of business in everyday life. Teaching and learning are organised to provide a balanced and varied sequence of work.
Physical education	Very good. Students achieve well. Very good teaching by well-trained staff.
Art	Very good. Standards are above average. Students build up detailed knowledge of chosen artists. Rapidly improving department: strong teaching.
Drama and theatre studies	Very good. Above average standards. Very good teaching using exceptional theatre facilities.
Geography	Good. Overall standards well above average. Students make good progress from GCSE. Teaching and learning reflects good planning and positive interaction with students. Excellent fieldwork.
History	Very good. Students gain detailed subject knowledge and have strengths in extended writing and source handling. Very good teaching and learning due to the efforts of an enthusiastic and well led department.
Psychology	Good. Students gain a detailed knowledge as a result of good teaching. Relationships are good and support is effective. Information and communication technology (ICT) is insufficiently used.
English	Good. Standards are average and improving well. Teaching is energetic and effective, resulting in good attitudes and learning.
French	Satisfactory. Average attainment; satisfactory gains in vocabulary and pronunciation. Good teaching, but few opportunities for independent research.

Other areas of the curriculum were sampled. Chemistry standards are not as high as biology or physics, but the quality of teaching is comparable. Vocational courses provide good opportunities for research, teamwork, presentation and other key skills. Teaching is enthusiastic. Students are well motivated and achieve with varying degrees of success, but standards are below average.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Support and guidance are satisfactory. Students receive good guidance on careers, university entry and employment. No tutor period or PSHE, but there are regular assemblies. There is unsatisfactory monitoring of attendance. Students who are underachieving are supported. Reports to parents are good. The use of assessment data is as yet in its infancy.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Sixth Form	Leadership and management of the Sixth Form are good. Appropriate priorities for development are identified and strategic planning is good. There is equality of opportunity for all. The management structure is effective, as is the involvement of governors. Finances are managed well.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the Sixth Form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendly and supportive atmosphere. • Available supportive teachers. • Wide range of courses. • Challenging work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accommodation and provision of a place to work. • Inadequacy of ICT resources. • Careers information in Year 12. • Consistency in the work of tutors.

The inspectors agree with most of the views of students. Accommodation is unsatisfactory, although the college is taking steps to improve it as much as possible. Computer access is insufficient. There is good provision for careers education, but the work of tutors is not well enough established. The Sixth Form does provide a good range of courses that satisfy the talents and aspirations of students. Teaching is good, with good relationships between students and teachers.

PART B: COMMENTARY

How high are standards?

The college's results and pupils' achievements

Strengths:

- Attainment in some subjects was high in GCSE examinations in 2001: the most successful subjects were drama, English literature, music, physical education, science and textiles.
- The college exceeded the targets it set for itself in 2001.
- The inspection found that attainment is currently close to the national average, overall.
- Pupils achieve well overall in the main college and the Sixth Form.

Areas for development:

- Some subjects, such as ICT and religious education, are not getting the best out of the pupils, because provision is less good than in the more successful subjects.

For pupils from 11 to 16

1. The attainment of pupils on entry to the college is well below average. Analysis of the results of the end of Year 6 national tests for primary school pupils who have entered the college over the last two years shows that their attainment is well below average in English and mathematics and below average in science. Pupils make good progress during their time at the college and their achievement is good overall. Their levels of attainment are below average at the age of 14 but average at the age of 16 when their results are compared with schools that have similar pupils. However, they are below average when compared with results across the country as a whole.

Performance in the national tests at the end of Year 9

2. Attainment in the national tests at the end of Year 9 has been below the national average overall for the last two years, and below average compared with similar schools. Results in English were well below average in 2000 and below in 2001, compared with results nationally and those of similar schools. Results in mathematics were below average in 2000 but average in 2001, against national figures and similar schools. In science, attainment was below average in 2000 and 2001, but average compared with similar schools. Over time, results in the national tests have improved broadly in line with the national trend. Both boys and girls have attained results below average in the national tests in recent years. Boys have attained less well than girls, as has been the case nationally.

Attainment at the end of Year 9

3. The finding of the inspection is that attainment at the age of 14 is below the national average overall, but that it varies from subject to subject. This represents good achievement in a number of subjects, in which pupils' standards have risen from being below or well below average on entry to the college to being close to average by the end of Year 9.

4. Attainment is below the national average in English, where significant numbers of pupils have failed to reach the expected level in the national tests. They still have literacy problems that affect their abilities to express their ideas clearly, fluently and accurately in a written form. Attainment in science is below the expected level for a significant proportion of pupils, who have not secured a strong enough basic knowledge of scientific principles. In mathematics, attainment is broadly average. Most pupils are numerate and, as in all three of these core subjects, have achieved well from low levels of attainment on entry to the college.

5. Attainment is below average in ICT because the coverage of the skills and knowledge required of pupils at this age is inconsistent, and access to equipment is restricted in some subject areas. It is below average in history, partly because of restricted literacy skills that affect pupils' abilities to read with understanding and express their ideas in writing. Achievement is satisfactory in history but unsatisfactory in ICT.

6. Pupils achieve well in art, design and technology, geography, modern foreign languages, music, physical education and religious education. It is above average in drama. In all these subjects, they make good progress through Years 7 to 9 and attain standards that are in line with the national average. Full details of what pupils do well and what they need to improve can be found in the subject reports in Part C of this report.

Attainment in GCSE examinations

7. Pupils achieve appropriately in GCSE examinations, making satisfactory progress from their levels of attainment at the end of Year 9.

8. At the end of Year 11, the proportion of pupils who attained five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C in 2001 was in line both with the national average and the average for similar schools. The proportions who attained five or more passes in the A* to G range, and one or more pass at A* to G, were well below both the national average and similar schools. This is because almost ten per cent of pupils in Year 11 were following work-related courses that did not have GCSE accreditation. The overall performance at GCSE was below the average nationally, as it has been for the past two years, but in line with the average for similar schools. This represents an improvement in performance since 1999 when it was well below average compared with the country as a whole. Attainment overall has improved since the last report and has increased in line with the national trend.

9. The most successful subjects at GCSE in 2001 were drama, English literature, music, physics and combined sciences. The subjects that performed least well relative to all others in the college were art and design, business studies, French and German. The college exceeded the targets it set for itself in 2001.

10. Boys and girls attained equally well in 2001 compared with their peers across the country as a whole, although girls had significantly underperformed in the two previous years. There was no significant difference between boys' and girls' levels of attainment observed during the inspection. The college exceeded the targets it set for itself in 2001. Overall, attainment in literacy and numeracy is close to average by the age of 16. Oracy skills are satisfactory and developed well.

Attainment at the age of 16

11. The finding of the inspection is that the current levels of attainment of pupils in Year 11 are in line, overall, with the average nationally. There is some variation from subject to subject, however. Attainment is close to the national average in English: satisfactory in reading, speaking and listening. It is just satisfactory in writing, but there are still weaknesses in the quality and accuracy of the written work of a significant minority of the pupils, as was the case at the age of 14. Nevertheless, achievement is good overall. In mathematics, attainment is also in line with the average nationally. There has been good achievement and good improvement compared with standards at the age of 14. Provision and standards are much improved since the previous report. In science, attainment is average, but well above the average in similar schools. They have achieved very well and the latest examination results reflect this, being much improved on previous years.

12. In two subjects, French and art, there have been staffing difficulties in the past that have affected the standards reached by the current Year 11 pupils. This means that their attainment and achievement are now below average, though there is good capacity for improvement. In modern foreign languages, some examination classes have not had continuity of teaching through their secondary schooling, and this has led to below average attainment in French. Attainment is above average in German, where staff changes have been less significant. Similarly in art, attainment is below average currently, but the impact of the better teaching evident over the past two years has still to have an effect on the older pupils. There are already strengths in this subject, however, especially in fibre arts (such as batik and weaving) and pupils' research and annotation skills.

13. Attainment is below the expectations set out in the locally Agreed Syllabus in religious education. There is a lack of breadth and depth in pupils' understanding and knowledge of the subject, made worse by poor attitudes towards the study of religious education that leads to inattention and a lack of concentration in lessons. In ICT, attainment is below average because of a lack of access to the full programme of study in the subject over time that has affected the progress that the present Year 11 pupils have been able to make. Achievement is unsatisfactory in both subjects.

14. Attainment is average in history and pupils achieve well, producing course work of a good standard. Similarly in geography, pupils reach average levels of attainment and achieve well, producing well-presented and detailed presentations from good fieldwork studies. In business studies, attainment is average and achievement good. There is a good balance of understanding of both economic theory and business practice.

15. Attainment is above national averages in three subjects. In design and technology, attainment is above average overall, though it varies from aspect to aspect within the subject. It is highest in textiles, where there are examples of very high achievement and work of considerable quality. Pupils achieve well in drama and attainment is above the national average. Attainment is well above average in music. Those pupils who take GCSE music and have instrumental tuition achieve very well and attain high standards, as the quality of the college orchestra testifies. Across the college, the majority of pupils identified as having special educational needs are achieving satisfactorily.

The college's results and achievements for students in the Sixth Form

16. In 2000, the average point score at Advanced Level of all students was close to the national average in maintained schools. Male and female students performed equally well. About one third of the students gained a grade A/B. In 2001, the proportion of students gaining higher grades was similar to the previous year, and again there was no variation

between male and female. These levels of attainment represent significant improvement over the results in 1999. The proportion of higher grades has more than doubled since then. The GCE A Level subjects with above average grades in 2001 were drama, English, geography, history and music. Standards in biology, economics, physics and sociology were below average. Other subjects were close to average.

17. Attainment in the Advanced vocational courses of business studies, health and social care, and ICT has been mixed but below average overall. In 2001, approximately half of the small number of students gained a merit in GNVQ, and no one failed. In Advanced vocational certificates, only a few students gained higher grades; these were in ICT. In GNVQ intermediate in business studies, health and social care and leisure and tourism, only a few of the students achieved a merit, while an equal number failed to gain an accreditation.

18. In the work seen in lessons and from an analysis of students' records, overall attainment is close to expected standards and shows signs of significant improvement in many subjects. Students are achieving well and making good progress compared with their results in their GCSE examinations. Standards are above average in art, biology, drama, geography, history, music, physical education, physics and psychology. Other subjects are average. Standards in vocational subject are improving and are above those reflected in examination results last year. Many students have developed a very positive attitude that results in good relationships and effective achievement.

19. Literacy, numeracy and ICT standards in the Sixth Form are below average. There is no compulsory programme for developing key skills, although they are an integral part of the work of vocational course students. Standards in the key skills element of these courses are below average.

Attitudes, values and personal development

Strengths:

- Most pupils have positive attitudes to the college.
- Most pupils behave appropriately in class and around the college.
- Most pupils relate well to teachers and to one another. Most develop independence and learn to work co-operatively with others.
- The college works hard to improve attendance and the overall figures are close to the national average.

Areas for development:

- There is a small, but significant, minority whose conduct can affect the learning of others.
- Punctuality to lessons is sometimes a problem, partly because of the distances between buildings.

Pupils aged 11 to 16

20. Most pupils have positive attitudes to the college. As was found at the time of the previous inspection, they attend regularly and on time, show much satisfaction and enjoyment in their lessons, and engage with enthusiasm in the good range of extra-curricular activities available to them. Their good behaviour in the great majority of lessons

contributes effectively to the learning environment. They relate well to their teachers and their colleagues. There remains a small minority in all year groups, but particularly in Years 8, 9 and 10, who are uncooperative on occasions. Attendance has improved over the last year, but remains slightly below the national average.

21. Bideford College is a very inclusive community. The comprehensive nature of its intake is reflected as much in the attitude and behaviour of the pupils as it is in the broad spread of their academic ability. Most pupils enjoy their schooling. They are lively, friendly and co-operative, moving about the complex of buildings purposefully and showing much courtesy in their dealings with members of staff and visitors. At all levels, they show interest in their work and are happy to discuss it with visitors. They respond well to their teachers and are keen to learn. They also involve themselves enthusiastically in the broad range of extra-curricular opportunities provided by the college, particularly in the realms of drama, music and sport. These good attitudes are in marked contrast to those shown by a few malcontents, mostly boys, who are reluctant to accept discipline or observe social norms. Individuals and small groups of pupils are, on occasion, rude to teachers and reluctant to do the work that is set for them. Teachers, generally, cope well with these challenging situations, although the disruption is always detrimental to the learning of others in the class. The evidence of the inspection is that the incidence of disorder in the classroom diminishes as pupils move up through the college. Overall, the attitude and response of pupils are better in Years 10 and 11 than amongst younger pupils. In the Sixth Form, they are almost always good or very good.

22. The behaviour of the vast majority of pupils is good in lessons. Around the college, generally, it is satisfactory. Most act in a civilised and orderly way and show much courtesy, holding open doors, saying "please" and "thank you" when appropriate, and treating their own and college property with care. They are familiar with the long established college rules and the sanctions that are applied in cases of serious or persistent misbehaviour. Nevertheless, a few pupils do misbehave. They lack self-control and are inclined to be discourteous and unruly. When corrected, they are slow to accept the authority of their teachers. Because of this truculence, time is sometimes wasted in lessons whilst the teacher seeks to establish order and discipline. The result is that pupils learn less.

23. The sanction of permanent exclusion is rarely used and the incidence is low compared with other schools of this size nationally. There have, historically, been a high number of fixed term exclusions in the college. Procedures have been proper and the reasons have been sound, but the headteacher recognises that the ready resort to this sanction has not been effective in raising standards of behaviour. As part of an overall review of policy, he has introduced alternative strategies, including internal exclusion from mainstream lessons and the early involvement of parents. Over recent months, there have been few fixed term exclusions, and the college has been very successful in keeping working pupils who are at risk from exclusion in college. In addition, the college has good procedures to reintegrate pupils who have been excluded.

24. Many pupils respond well to the opportunities provided for their personal development and take an active part in college life. Overall, they show satisfactory responses to the opportunities provided to take initiative and responsibility. Small numbers of pupils, whose attitudes to education are sometimes unsatisfactory, are reluctant to do anything for themselves. By contrast, pupils serving on the year group councils show much maturity and sense of responsibility in the ways they represent their peer groups' interests and in making constructive suggestions for developments in the college. Similarly, the pupils and students elected to the group that agrees how the college fund should be spent responds

well. They prove worthy of the confidence placed in them and make imaginative but prudent decisions, ensuring that they get value for money. In their various lessons, many pupils progressively acquire independent learning skills and make good use of their diaries to plan their work.

25. Relationships are good. Pupils mix and work well together. Most benefit from the personal and social education provided. They learn to respect differences between people and understand the feelings, values and beliefs of others. A few are less sensitive and find it difficult to desist from banter and horseplay that can be intimidating. All recognise that there is some unpleasant behaviour and some bullying in the college, mostly in the form of name-calling. All members of staff are alert to this, but the complex nature of the site creates considerable difficulty in ensuring that there is always effective supervision of pupils during recreational times. Despite the problems, pupils have the confidence to approach staff with their problems, knowing that their voices will be heard and action taken.

26. The college tries hard to encourage regular and prompt attendance and analyses attendance records carefully. Nevertheless, there is a pattern of declining attendance from Year 7 to Year 11. The rate overall is slightly below the national average. Unauthorised absence is above the national average, reflecting the firm stance that the college takes on family holidays during term time. Such absences are authorised only in exceptional circumstances. Punctuality is a problem across the college, though it is not always the fault of the pupils. Many use school buses and sometimes these are delayed. Between lessons, pupils sometimes have considerable distances to negotiate, often in inclement weather. Despite these problems, most pupils arrive on time; it is the minority of pupils who appear to have a very casual approach to punctuality, taking their time as they walk across the site to their next lesson. The result is a significant slippage in the time some pupils spend in the classroom.

Students in the Sixth Form

27. Students enjoy their time in the Sixth Form. They work well at their studies and take much pride in their work. In two thirds of the lessons observed during the inspection, their attitude was judged to be very good or excellent. Although based in premises some distance from the main college site, they are a significant presence amongst the younger pupils and an influence for order and stability. Many students take advantage of the opportunities offered to be involved in the daily life of the college. They show confidence, maturity and a strong sense of responsibility when, for example, they lead assemblies for their younger colleagues, or chair meetings to decide on how money from the college fund can be most equitably and fruitfully spent to improve the facilities for all. Many students give up much free time to act as Millennium Volunteers, working in the community, assisting in the classroom, engaging in conservation work. Relationships at all levels are good. Students work together harmoniously, support each other well and take a full part in the sporting and recreational pursuits of the college. Attendance in Year 12, where registers are taken twice daily, is similar to that found amongst senior pupils in the main college. In Year 13, though, where registration takes place only in the morning, the recorded attendance rate drops to 76 per cent, and 11 per cent of the absence is unauthorised. This is not satisfactory.

TEACHING

Strengths:

- Teaching is good overall in the main college and the Sixth Form.
- Examples of very good teaching were observed in almost all subjects, but especially in art, drama, English, mathematics, music and physical education.
- Pupils learn well, because they are interested and teachers have good knowledge of their subjects.
- Teaching has improved significantly since the last report.

Areas for development:

- The work is not always challenging enough for all pupils.
- In a few cases, class control is unsatisfactory.

28. Teaching is good, overall. This leads to most pupils achieving well, because they make good progress, are interested in their studies and develop good learning skills. There is a small minority of pupils whose attitudes to education are unsatisfactory and this leads to unsatisfactory learning. Across all the lessons seen, teaching was satisfactory or better in the very large majority. Only 14 unsatisfactory lessons (5.8 per cent of the total) were observed out of 240. Around a quarter of the teaching observed in the college was very good or excellent, with good teaching in more than two fifths of lessons.

The teaching of pupils aged 11 to 16

29. Teaching is good overall. In the lessons observed, it was satisfactory or better in 93 per cent, with very good or excellent teaching in 24 per cent. Teachers' good subject knowledge and good management of lessons are key strengths of the good and better lessons. These lessons are brisk and well focused on clear learning objectives, with high expectations of pupils' work rates and conduct. Pupils develop good learning skills because of such teaching and make good progress. However, in a minority of lessons, the unsatisfactory attitudes of a minority of pupils cause problems for teachers if they do not motivate them well. In these lessons, pupils do not always work hard enough to make the expected progress. Teaching has improved significantly since the last report, when it was reported that almost 20 per cent of teaching was unsatisfactory for pupils aged 11 to 16. The college has made this a focus of recent professional development, and there is evidence that this, along with team and individual review processes, the recruitment of good new staff and hard work from all teachers, has brought about the improvements that are now apparent.

30. Most teachers plan their lessons effectively to take account of the varied needs of different groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs and the few pupils for whom EAL. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is satisfactory across the college. Most pupils have sufficient numeracy skills to cope with the demands of subjects up to Year 11. Literacy is taught well in English. In some other subjects, such as art, teachers show a growing awareness of the need to reinforce and develop literacy skills, including the teaching of subject-specific vocabulary. However, not all teachers are sufficiently aware of their responsibility to assist pupils to become more literate. Homework is set regularly and extends the opportunities for study provided in class.

31. Examples of very good teaching were observed in almost all subject areas, but especially in art, drama, English, mathematics, music and physical education. Such lessons are very well prepared to offer an interesting and appropriate range of activities to interest and motivate pupils. A good beginning to the lesson introduces the work in an exciting way and makes expectations clear. The result is that pupils know what is expected

of them and are enthusiastic. The teachers' high expectations, very good relationships and management of pupils mean that no time is wasted and pupils respond very well to the work that is set. The work is reviewed towards the end of the lesson to consolidate learning. In a mathematics lesson with Year 10 pupils, for example, there was a good, well paced starting activity to focus the pupils and get their attention. Excellent relationships and very good control ensured that the pupils listened and learnt from the teacher, showing interest in the challenges presented by their work on simultaneous equations. The teacher's expectations were high and the pupils responded well in the standards of their work and behaviour. A Year 9 class, studying dance, enjoyed a very good and appropriate warm-up exercise that the teacher had planned. She reinforced well their earlier work on step patterns and formations so that the pupils were ready and eager to go on to the next stage of their learning. The very good pace that she set and the good feedback she gave them on their performance ensured that their skills were developed on a secure basis. Her expertise and enthusiasm for the subject helped to enthuse the pupils, so that they made very good progress and attained high standards.

32. In the lessons that were less than satisfactory, the pace of learning was too slow. This was often because the teacher failed to establish a positive relationship with the pupils or because their attitudes to learning were poor. In a science lesson with Year 10 pupils, the teacher explained the task clearly but the pupils were not motivated and little enthusiasm was engendered. They chatted during parts of the lesson. They stood around for long periods, waiting for chemicals to heat so that the reaction could take place, without challenging or interesting activities to occupy their time productively.

33. Another factor that leads to unsatisfactory teaching or unsatisfactory learning is the inappropriate tasks that are sometimes set for the lower or higher attainers in lessons. If assessment information is not used to set tasks that are interesting and challenging for all learners in a class, then there is a likelihood that some pupils will be bored and underachieve. There are occasions when teacher's expectations are not high enough, either of the work that pupils are capable of or of their behaviour and response. Lessons were observed in which a group of pupils was able to be disruptive and do little work. The same group was observed later with another teacher behaving well and working hard. Better relationships, higher expectations and more appropriate work made the difference. There are some excellent examples of inclusive teaching where all the class are enabled to work to a high standard. The college needs to be aware of this and share this best practice more widely. For example, in an art lesson where the teaching was judged to be excellent, a Year 10 class was working on a follow-up from their visit to the Eden Project. Almost half the class was on the special needs register and two were hearing impaired, while some members of the class were high attaining pupils. The teacher had planned the lesson very well indeed to ensure that all could succeed at an appropriate task. The support assistants were well briefed, so that they could give well targeted support to individuals with special needs. The excellent, brief, clear introduction was signed for the pupils with hearing disabilities. The teacher adapted her teaching and guidance very well to the needs and abilities of individuals and small groups of pupils as she moved around the class. All enjoyed the lesson, all made excellent progress, relationships were very good and the higher attainers supported the lower attainers very well.

34. Across the curriculum, teaching of classes in Years 7 to 11 is at least satisfactory in all subjects. The teaching of mathematics is good, with thorough coverage of the subject. Good subject knowledge leads to good teaching in English. In science and geography, teaching is satisfactory for Years 7 to 9 as teachers develop the basic knowledge needed by pupils, and good in Years 10 and 11 as they extend them further. The teachers of design and technology manage classes skilfully and teaching is good overall. It is also good in ICT for Years 7 to 9, but less consistent coverage of the curriculum means that teaching is satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Good subject knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject

lead to good teaching in history, physical education and religious education. Physical education teachers give good attention to skills development, but need to make more use of peer evaluation to help pupils to improve their expertise. Teaching is satisfactory in modern foreign languages. There are many examples of good teaching, but some instances of unsatisfactory teaching when teachers struggle to motivate reluctant learners in Years 10 and 11, some of whom have had a history of many changes of teacher. Teaching is good in business studies in Years 10 and 11, with a good concentration on the skills that pupils need.

35. There are many instances of very good teaching in art and music. Music teachers have a very good understanding of the examination requirements and prepare their pupils very well. The art teachers' very good subject knowledge and enthusiasm ensure that their pupils learn very well.

36. The quality of teaching for pupils with special educational needs in mainstream classes is satisfactory. The teaching for the small groups of pupils who are withdrawn at Years 7 to 9 is good. The teaching assistants support pupils well and their help is valued by the teachers.

Sixth Form Teaching

37. The good quality of teaching is a significant factor in the good progress that pupils make. In the Sixth Form, teaching was good or better in four fifths of the lessons observed. A third were very good or excellent. Unsatisfactory teaching was seen in only one lesson in the Sixth Form. The students are mature and responsible learners as a result of the generally very good provision. The best teaching is helping students to develop independent learning and research skills.

38. Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons well, progressively building students' knowledge, skills and confidence. Expectations are generally high. Most lessons have clear learning objectives, shared with the students so that they know what is expected of them. In the better lessons, students are challenged and expected to make significant gains in learning. Most teachers structure the work and offer individual support and guidance so as to ensure that students make progress in their learning.

39. There is a good pace to the teaching, which ensures that students work hard and cover considerable amounts in each session. All teachers are enthusiastic about the subjects they are teaching, and this enthusiasm motivates and interests their students. This increases their commitment, ensures their concentration and encourages them to work hard. A GNVQ travel and tourism lesson with Year 12 students was an example of very good teaching. The teacher had assembled a very good range of resource materials that supported students' learning well, enabling them to develop their research skills individually. They were able to find information easily and quickly so that they worked at a good pace. Assessment was used very well to support them in their work. The teacher used knowledge of each pupil's strengths and weaknesses to guide and support them. The teacher's own very good knowledge of the subject and of the requirements of the course meant that the information given was very appropriate to the needs and aspirations of the students. This led to their making very good progress and achieving well. Many other examples were seen of very good and excellent teaching across almost all subjects. The only unsatisfactory lesson observed occurred when a substitute teacher, covering for illness, did not have the necessary subject knowledge to extend the students' understanding and knowledge in a subject outside her own specialist area.

40. Thirteen subjects were inspected in detail. Others were sampled. In the focus subjects, the quality of teaching was very good in art, biology, drama, history, music, physical education and textiles. Teaching was good in business education, design and technology, English, French, geography, physics and psychology. Teaching was also good in the sampled lessons in leisure and tourism, and health and social care vocational courses. In other subjects, teaching was satisfactory overall.

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

The Curriculum

Strengths:

- The curriculum is broad in the main college and in the Sixth Form, with a good range of subjects.
- There are many opportunities to join in clubs, activities and trips outside college time. These enhance the curriculum and develop pupils' interests and their social and cultural awareness.
- The provision has improved since the last report.
- The provision for pupils' moral and social development is very good.

Areas for development:

- The provision for ICT is insufficient to meet the full requirements of the National Curriculum.
- The requirement to teach religious education in the Sixth Form is not met.

41. Overall, the quality and range of opportunities available are good. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last report. The curriculum matches the needs of a large college. The time allowed for coverage of the curriculum now meets national recommendations. There is a good range of subject choice in Years 10 and 11 and in the Sixth Form. Curricular provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. Extra-curricular activities continue to be a real strength. However, the college is not meeting all statutory requirements. The provision for ICT is insufficient for pupils to develop their skills adequately, and there is no teaching of religious education to all students in the Sixth Form.

For pupils aged 11 to 16

42. In Years 7, 8 and 9, all pupils study the range of subjects of the National Curriculum, religious education, PSHE and drama. Although teaching time has been extended overall, humanities subjects still share a relatively small proportion of it in Years 7 to 9, and this has a slightly adverse effect on standards. In geography, it is difficult to fit in time for fieldwork. Pupils have inadequate time to cover all aspects of the curriculum in detail in history. Religious education offers a broad coverage of all major world faiths, but there is a concern that shortage of time here provides an unsatisfactory basis for work in Years 10 and 11.

43. In Years 10 and 11, pupils have access to a wide range of subjects, including drama, business studies, sociology, a very good choice within art and technology subjects, and three sciences for the more able. In spite of the admirable breadth of the Year 10 and 11 curriculum, a number of pupils require alternative courses to develop their basic skills and prepare them in a more practical way for adult life and the world of work. Provision for these pupils has been reviewed and they are now able to gain accreditation for some areas

of their course, such as the work-related element. The Certificate of Achievement is offered as an alternative to GCSE in several subjects and has been well received by pupils and parents. These are positive developments and in line with the college's philosophy of inclusion.

44. The college is not providing adequately for pupils to increase their ICT skills. There is some progress towards complying with National Curriculum requirements, but deficiencies remain in resourcing and in departmental and cross-college planning. Pupils often share computers in lessons, and there is insufficient access to supplement this through clubs and drop-in sessions. In Years 7 to 9, pupils' progress in the timetabled weekly lesson is not systematically reinforced by their use of ICT in other subjects, and there is a need to make more use of assessment information to track their coverage of ICT and their progress. Many departments have not yet made provision for integrating the development of pupils' ICT skills into their schemes of work.

45. The college has good links with its community and is continually looking for opportunities to extend them. These links are a strength, helping to ensure that pupils enjoy a stimulating and broad curriculum. Local businesses make a valued contribution to Advanced VCE courses, and the Rotary club sponsors a writing competition. The art department makes excellent use of local artists. Performances of dance, drama and music regularly provide a showcase for the work of the college in the local area. There are many fixtures with local schools, both secondary and Post 16. Liaison with primary schools is well established. There is an effective exchange of information between these schools and the college's pastoral staff and teachers of pupils with special educational needs. Nevertheless, there is scope for strengthening curricular links between subject staff in the college and its partner primary schools. Good use is made of links with providers of higher education, particularly those in the South West and South Wales.

46. Curricular provision for pupils with special educational need is satisfactory overall, and that for pupils with hearing impairment is very good. Learning support assistants work effectively to support delivery of the curriculum in lessons. They are well managed by the co-ordinator for special needs, whose work is well supported by the governing body. The individual educational plans of these pupils identify targets that refer to behaviour as well as to academic work, and they are regularly reviewed. Some teachers make specific reference to these targets in their planning. The handling of pupils' individual learning needs varies across subjects at Years 7 to 9. The creation of smaller groups for some pupils within English, for example, makes it difficult to meet the needs of those in larger groups in Year 9. In mathematics, provision for pupils with special educational needs is successful because it is guided by good schemes of work. In geography, not enough suitable work is planned at different levels to support the range of pupils' needs in mixed ability groups. In art, a well-structured and varied learning programme meets pupils' needs.

47. Pupils following an alternative curriculum at Years 10 and 11 are not always well catered for. There is not a coherent overview amongst staff of the courses available to these pupils. The absence of accreditation for much of what they are doing does little to encourage them to develop a constructive attitude to learning or self-discipline. Support for the development of basic skills is inconsistent. The Integrated Course curriculum lacks detail and the college-based elements of the XL course do not relate sufficiently closely to individual needs or to the world of work. Some pupils would benefit from easier access to counselling.

48. The curriculum gives satisfactory equality of opportunity, overall. The college has begun to implement the national strategies for literacy and numeracy, both within the English and mathematics departments and across the institution. The work on literacy has been supplemented by a successful bid for involvement in a project designed to raise the

achievement of boys. While there are some examples of good development of pupils' basic skills - numeracy in Years 10 and 11 geography, for example – there are many pupils whose attainment is limited because their literacy or numeracy skills are poor. There are no structures in place to monitor the effects of the strategies and to ensure that pupils have equal access across subjects to the fresh insights made available through national research into literacy and numeracy.

49. The college makes good provision both for PSHE and work-related education. Careers guidance is provided within the programme for PSHE and resources in the library support this. Pupils also have access to an external careers advisor in small groups; Sixth Formers make individual appointments as necessary. In Year 11, the 'carousel' delivery of the careers element within the PSHE programme inevitably means that specific careers advice comes rather late for some of the pupils who intend to leave at 16. The college has satisfactory links with employers and regularly finds placements in the local area for the large numbers in Years 10 and 11. A few students have recently completed successful work placements in Europe.

The Sixth Form curriculum

50. The quality and range of provision in the Sixth Form is good. The courses offered lead to GCE Advanced (A) or Advanced Subsidiary (AS) Level in over 15 different subjects, although some run with few students. In Year 13, most students follow the A2 course, leading to A Level. In Year 12, about half of the students follow AS courses, while most of the remainder take Advanced or intermediate vocational courses in business studies, health and social care, leisure and tourism or ICT. Key skills teaching is compulsory for vocational course students, but it is intended to be an integral part of GCE A Level subjects. There is no guarantee that students are taught the use of computers in their subjects. There is no provision for religious education. There is also no taught provision for PSHE, but elements of personal education are covered in assemblies.

51. A few opportunities are provided to enrich the curriculum, for example the millennium volunteer community work, Duke of Edinburgh Scheme, Young Enterprise businesses and involvement in Added Power and Understanding in Sex Education (APAUSE), where Sixth Formers help with sex education to Year 9. Work experience is available to all students in Year 12. There are sports clubs, and opportunities for music and drama are strong. Overall, the range of extra-curricular opportunities is satisfactory and is continuing to develop. Charity work is being started. Careers advice is well organised and interviews are available on an individual basis. Visits to universities are arranged as needed.

52. The courses provided in the Sixth Form match well the aspirations of those moving to higher education, and the subject choice is extremely wide. The vocational courses offer appropriate study in popular areas. There is a policy of equal access to courses for those who meet the entry requirements.

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

For pupils aged 11 to 16

53. The college makes good provision overall for pupils' personal development and this has improved since the last inspection. Overall, the provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is good, though some aspects of it are stronger than others. The provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. Assemblies throughout the week offer pupils some opportunity for quiet reflection. There were significant moments

of spirituality in a good assembly for Year 9, where there was a pause for reflection and a prayer. The theme of Valentine's Day led on well to reflection on unselfish love and the death of Princess Margaret. Good examples were also observed in English, such as a Year 9 discussion of *Macbeth* concerning the concept of life after death. In religious education, lessons were observed in which there was good coverage of the noble *Eightfold Path* in Buddhism, and opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own lives and to consider how the *Qur'an* inspires faith and gives guidance. There are good instances in art and geography, but there is still room for the spiritual element to be included more consistently by all departments in their planning of schemes of work. An assistant principal is drawing up an action plan to improve provision further, by such means as more consistent inclusion of spiritual and moral provision in assemblies, with music and pupil participation in reflection or prayer.

54. The provision for moral education is very good. Pupils are clear about what is right and wrong and have the school's code of conduct in their planners. The teachers set the tone by their example and expectations for responsible behaviour and self-discipline. In many lessons this is notably strong, as it is in physical education, where pupils work by the teachers' code of conduct in an atmosphere of courtesy and co-operation and learn to accept the referee's decision in success and failure. The moral aspect is a very good feature in art, history, PSHE, and religious education lessons. In PSHE and in history and religious education, the consideration of the ethical aspects of topics being taught is very well done. The moral provision is good in information technology, and in English and drama. There are clear moral messages in some assemblies, and there are regular opportunities to behave generously and to give service through the school's regular fund-raising for a number of charities. Moral themes are explored very well through drama and literature.

55. The provision for social education is very good. Good use is made of small group work in art, drama, English, geography, mathematics and science to develop collaborative skills. The Year Councils are impressive, and help to develop a very good sense of responsibility. The Governors' Awards evening in the community theatre for pupils in Years 7 to 9 was observed and seen to be a very good occasion for the recognition of achievement and effort. The event was a real celebration of positive attitudes. Certificates were awarded, with pupils' families present, and photographs taken. The very strong extra-curricular programme, including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, outdoor adventure activities and the many lunchtime clubs, contributes very effectively to the social provision, as does the inclusion of hearing impaired, Downs syndrome and other pupils with special needs in the main curriculum and all other activities.

56. The provision for cultural education is good. It is very good in art, covering work on Egyptian, Aztec, Mexican and Aboriginal art, pop art, Modern and post Modern art, extensive European studies, North American and Native American art. There is also very good coverage of the extensive local art scene. An exhibition of the pupils' work was on public display in Bideford during the inspection. Cultural provision is good in music. There is an orchestra, choirs and many music groups, including African drummers, flute choirs and a wind band. It is good in drama where many pupils get the chance to take part in productions, and in religious education where pupils in the first three years learn about six world faiths in ways that encourage understanding and respect. Provision is good in modern foreign languages where pupils have the benefit of native speakers and good displays of European cultures. The cultural provision is strong in English and in textiles, which contributes some high quality displays to corridors and office areas, and there are some good features to the work in geography where there are studies on Japan and Brazil. Christian cultural heritage is not always acknowledged, for example there was no reference

to Ash Wednesday or Lent during the week. The preparation for living in a culturally diverse society is uneven and needs to be strengthened overall. However, there is significant cultural input through the English curriculum, including theatre visits and the study of multicultural poetry.

Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in the Sixth Form

57. The provision in the Sixth Form mirrors that of the main college and is generally good overall. However, there are weaknesses, such as the continuing lack of religious education and the lack of a programme for PSHE.

58. Spiritual development is satisfactorily provided for and is a good feature in art, English and music. In these subjects, there are good chances to be inspired and to understand creativity. Nevertheless, there is a lack of collective worship, as in the main college, and limited opportunities for reflection and stillness.

59. The provision for moral development is good. It is provided through the wide range of opportunities to give service to the college community and to understand the significance of taking responsibility. These include membership of the student association, the responsibilities of head boy and head girl, and through the millennium volunteers' scheme. The students make a contract with the college when they begin their time in the Sixth Form, an important exercise in learning that there is mutual responsibility in beginning courses. Parents say that the Sixth Form students are trusted and respected by younger pupils, which indicates the positive impact made by college provision. Students are generous when the college is fund-raising for charities. Moral opportunities are notably good in art, English and history.

60. Social development is also provided for well. In most subjects, there are good opportunities for acquiring confidence and independent learning skills, and good relationships are a routine aspect of lessons. The college council and the range of opportunities for taking responsibility and exercising leadership also make a good contribution, as the Young Enterprise student group demonstrated by selling their Valentine cards during inspection week. Although there is no PSHE programme for all students, those volunteering for the 'APAUSE' scheme to be student counsellors with younger pupils do gain some valuable training. About 30 have done so this year. There are also opportunities to take part in expeditions, vocational courses and work experience, which make a good contribution to developing social skills.

61. The provision for cultural development is good overall. It is very good in art and music where there is rich provision. Art students visit the Tate Gallery, enjoy 'artists in residence' and art residential experiences. In music, students have the benefit of a good orchestra, visits to performances and a European exchange. Modern foreign languages, drama and English also provide good cultural experiences.

How well does the college care for its pupils?

Strengths:

- Educational and personal support and guidance are satisfactory overall. Personal support is good.

Areas for development:

- There are weaknesses in the use of assessment information to help pupils to progress, but these are being addressed.

For pupils aged 11 to 16

62. The college has been successful in developing a caring and supportive environment for its pupils. Form tutors and heads of year know their pupils well and liaise constructively as a team to ensure their welfare. Effective action has been taken to minimise the concerns about health and safety that were identified in the previous inspection report. Arrangements for child protection continue to be good. Procedures to promote regular attendance are good. The college is aware of weaknesses in its procedures to promote good behaviour and the headteacher has recently initiated a thorough review of policy and practice to address the shortcomings. The procedures for monitoring and promoting pupils' personal development are good. The assessment of pupils' work is satisfactory overall. The more effective use of assessment information to raise pupils' academic performance has been identified by the college as an area for development.

63. Good liaison with primary schools through the Academic Council and other routine teacher contacts, particularly through the special educational needs co-ordinator, ensures that much is known about pupils arriving at Bideford College for the first time. Thereafter, the prime responsibility for individual pupil care lies with form tutors. They stay with the same group of pupils throughout their five years of secondary education. Heads of year monitor the arrangements closely and maintain extensive and detailed records of academic and personal development. Generally this works well, and the college makes very good provision for the significant minority who need additional support. This includes pupils with hearing impairment, severe learning difficulties, behavioural problems, or those who, for whatever reason, find it difficult to adapt to normal college life. The college identifies resources within its own staff and works very closely with outside agencies to provide an alternative curriculum in order to include all these pupils within its provision. This has often proved to be very effective for disaffected pupils, particularly through the integrated course offered to pupils in Years 10 and 11, and the XL project for Year 11. Pupils have expressed very warm appreciation for the staff who provide this alternative curriculum, and have shown their interest and commitment by improvements in their attendance levels. Some of these improvements have been remarkable. Good as the arrangements for these pupils are, the college is well aware of the need to revise the curriculum in order for it to become accredited and thereby raise the self-esteem of the pupils concerned.

64. At the time of the previous inspection, the health and safety policy was under review by the governors. Since then, much progress has been made and documented. Advice has been taken from health and safety experts and from the fire authorities. An external audit has recently been carried out and areas for further action have been identified. The governors are fully involved. One area of concern currently being addressed by the headteacher is the safety of the many pupils and students who, routinely throughout the day, cross the two public roads that divide the site. Nevertheless, these arrangements

comply fully with local guidelines, as do the child protection arrangements. Good procedures are in place to maintain the awareness of all staff. The good PSHE programme is used effectively to raise pupils' confidence and to equip them with the skills to develop a healthy and safe lifestyle.

65. The college places considerable emphasis on regular and punctual attendance. Much good practice is in place. Registers are called promptly and properly at the beginning of morning and afternoon sessions, records are maintained with care and some good use is made of the electronic system to analyse patterns of absence. The education welfare officer works closely with the heads of year. If a pupil is absent whose attendance has been giving cause for concern, the home is contacted immediately. Considerable success has been achieved over the last year in discouraging parents from taking holidays during term time. Members of staff recognise that there is still much room for improvement and are considering a number of strategies, such as the introduction of computerised lesson registration to improve systems and practice still further.

66. The college's procedures for promoting good behaviour are satisfactory for the most part, but are currently under review to make them more effective with the small numbers of pupils whose behaviour is still a cause for concern. Some members of staff are concerned that the current discipline procedures lack consistency and are not always effective, particularly in providing strategies to deal with classroom incidents as and when they occur. The evidence of the inspection supports these concerns. It had been the intention of the headteacher to initiate the review much earlier, but the many staff changes that have taken place, particularly amongst the leadership team, delayed the proposed review until the current term. Critical changes have already been implemented, particularly by reducing the reliance on exclusion as a sanction and by involving parents in consultation about problems at a much earlier stage in proceedings. A formal consultation process with staff has now started and an action plan has been introduced, with appropriate target dates for completion. The successful implementation of a revised behaviour policy will be an essential part of the post-inspection action plan.

67. The monitoring of pupils' academic and personal development is satisfactory. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last report, when it was a significant weakness, but this is still one of the areas of the college's work that has been identified by the leadership team for improvement. The arrangements for supporting pupils within tutor groups are very effective. Form tutors and heads of year get to know the pupils very well. The tracking and targeting arrangements are now in place to help to identify and record good effort and achievement, but not all departments are implementing these fully. Assessment information is gathered well, but it is not being used consistently to set appropriate work for pupils in some subject areas. It is done well, however, in art, English, mathematics and science. Across the college, by sharing information with pupils and their parents, teachers reinforce the parents' partnership with the college, and pupils' progress is recognised and praised. In Year 11, assessment data is used for the mentoring programme and to set targets for GCSE performance. These levels are shared with parents prior to the parents' evening. Similarly, target grades are set in Year 9 and used at the parents' evening to help parents to understand the progress that their children are making and where they can support them further. Marking is generally carried out regularly and is useful to help pupils to improve their work. The quality of fieldwork in geography is high, because very good coursework is well planned and assessed. This improves the presentation of pupils' work very effectively. Very good advice to pupils on how to improve their work, based upon assessment, is a strength in music. However, there is no unified college assessment system. Each department grades in its own way, with some using numbers, some using letters and some using comments. There is a need now for more consistency across the college, so that pupils will better understand how well they are doing without having to interpret the different assessment systems across the subject areas.

The college's support and guidance for its Sixth Form students

Assessment

68. Reports to parents are good. Reports and annual and interim statements are sent to parents. They find them helpful, and the detail in them is sufficient to give good guidance to students on how to improve further in Post 16 subjects. The use of assessment data to monitor the progress of students and the effectiveness of Sixth Form teaching is developing but is in its infancy. One of the assistant principals is drawing up plans to extend and improve the use of assessment data at Sixth Form level. However, procedures for the assessment of Sixth Form students are satisfactory. The college is developing its range of assessment data for use by departments. Currently, information on entry scores, GCSE results and cognitive ability tests are assembled for all students. The A Level information system (ALIS system) is being introduced, but little has been done previously to evaluate students' strengths and weaknesses at GCSE. The use of targets is beginning but is still at an early stage. A student review is applied to students who are perceived to be under-performing. The use of the assessment data is inconsistent across departments, but overall is satisfactory.

Advice, support and guidance

69. The provision of support and guidance is satisfactory. The strengths are in the strong relationships that exist between students and staff and the teachers' very good knowledge of their students. All students are allocated to a tutor group and receive good guidance on careers, university entrance and employment. There is no tutor period or lessons on PSHE, though there are regular assemblies in which aspects relating to this course are explored. There are good systems for mentoring students. Subject teachers and the head of Sixth Form and his tutor team regularly review the progress that students are making, and support follows where necessary. Students who are underachieving are identified in departments and are interviewed. Advice with personal problems is readily available, and students appreciate the support and guidance that their teachers give them. They feel comfortable to discuss any problems they may have with appropriate members of staff.

70. Procedures for monitoring attendance are unsatisfactory. Students in Year 13 are only registered in the mornings, and some go to straight to lessons without informing their tutors that they are in college. This means that no adequate record is kept of their attendance, which was higher during the inspection week in lessons observed than was shown in the registers.

How well does the college work in partnership with parents?

Strengths:

- The college is very conscious of the important contribution that parents can make to support their children's learning, and it seeks to support them.
- The college has a good range of ways by which it informs parents and seeks to involve them in its work.

Areas for development:

- Although the college is well aware of the benefits of developing links with the pupils' homes, it is not successful with all parents.

71. Parents continue to have a largely positive view of the college. The features that please them most are largely those that attracted favorable comment in the previous inspection report. The great majority of parents think that their children are happy, develop responsible attitudes, work hard and make good progress. They find the staff approachable, consider the teaching good and appreciate the good range of activities provided outside lessons.

72. A substantial minority of parents has reservations about behaviour in the college, a view reflected in the unsatisfactory behaviour that was observed during the inspection in a small number of classes. Other parental concerns, about the information provided on the progress of pupils and about the quality and quantity of homework set, were not fully substantiated by inspection evidence. There is no doubt some variable practice, but, in the main, the homework set was found to be appropriate and the reports on pupils are of a satisfactory standard.

73. It is apparent, from the college's documentation and from speaking with many members of staff, that the college is very conscious of the important contribution that parents can make in support of their children's learning. Teachers are at pains to ensure both that the quality of information provided for parents is good, and also that it is presented in a way that enables parents to give constructive support to their children. The college has a number of ways through which it informs parents of the work of the college and seeks to involve them in it. Routine information about policies, procedures and day-to-day organisation are clearly set out in the prospectus and the governors' annual report. These are well presented booklets, containing much useful information in a readily digestible form. They have been improved significantly since the previous inspection, and now comply fully with statutory requirements. Letters to parents are written in a friendly format and often state the value that the college places on parental support.

74. Annual reports on pupils are of sound quality. They contain good detail on attainment, effort and the pupil's personal development. Good features are the pupil's own self-evaluation, the setting of targets for most subjects, and the opportunity provided for parents and pupils to comment. A weakness is that many of the targets are written in very general terms. Parents have the opportunity to discuss these reports and any concerns they may have at a parents' evening. Many parents choose not to take this opportunity, although there has been a marked increase over the last year in the response of parents of pupils in Years 7 and 9, with 70 per cent attending the consultation evening. This is some reflection of the increasing efforts being made by the college to involve parents as partners. There are others, many and various. For example, parents are invited to celebrate their children's achievements at concerts, sports events and the regular "Governors' Awards" evenings for individual effort and achievement. They are contacted at an early stage to provide support when pupils are absent, or regularly late, or have seriously misbehaved in lessons. They have opportunities to attend specialist talks, for instance on sex education or parenting skills. They are asked to discuss with teachers the arrangements for induction to the college or transfer between certain year groups, options, careers, course work and 'booster' classes.

75. The college has taken considerable efforts to create satisfactory links with parents. Nevertheless, the college wishes to improve these links further, being aware of the potential benefits to the quality of pupils' learning if their academic studies are supported at home.

Leadership and management

Strengths:

- The leadership and management of the college by the leadership team.
- The support of the governing body.
- Good progress since the time of the last report.
- The college is well placed to improve in future.

Areas for development:

- Monitoring of teaching and learning in some departments.
- The quality of the accommodation.

76. The leadership and management of the college by the principal, supported very ably by the vice principal, are good. Senior managers, newly in post, are already making a valuable contribution. The governing body fulfils its responsibilities well. The senior team and heads of most subjects monitor the college's performance effectively and use the results to guide their development planning. As a result of this analysis, effective action has been taken to improve the work of the college. This has led to good progress since the time of the last report and the college is well placed to improve in future. Resources are satisfactorily deployed to improve the quality of education for the benefit of pupils, and the college succeeds well in getting the best value from its use of its funds and resources. Levels of staffing are good. Teaching staff are well qualified and all teach their specialist subjects. The learning support assistants are well deployed, sufficient in number to meet the needs of pupils, and support pupils' learning very effectively. However, there are significant weaknesses in the quality of the accommodation.

77. The principal, along with the other senior managers, provides very clear direction for the work of the college. Since being appointed only 18 months before the inspection, a key focus of his work has been to improve the quality of leadership, which was judged to be unsatisfactory in the previous report. He realised that the management structure he had inherited was inadequate to lead, manage and monitor the work of such a large institution, and that the distribution of responsibilities was inappropriate. He produced a management plan and structure that widened the management team by including a number of new personnel, and completely revised the responsibilities and line management structure. Early indications are that this has been successful and the new leadership team is increasingly effective. The changes have taken a considerable time to bring about, because of the need to discuss them with the governors and the local education authority (LEA), to gain formal approval for the new structure, to find the funding to support it and to advertise the new posts.

78. There is now a clear and manageable delegation of responsibilities. The new assistant principal in charge of assessment has a very sound view of the ways in which data can be used. Plans are underway to measure the effectiveness of departments and their teachers, to modify the courses on offer in order to make them more suited to pupils' aspirations and needs, and to set targets for improvement. The assistant principals in charge of Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11 are taking a detailed overview of the provision in these areas, including the quality of teaching and learning and test and examination results. The assistant principal with responsibility for inclusion has already begun to evaluate the suitability of courses, especially for the lower attaining and reluctant pupils. The assistant principal responsible for personnel matters is focusing on the Investor in People project, performance management, staff development and the review of job descriptions. The vice principal has an excellent overview of the whole college and can now share her responsibilities for linking with and supporting heads of department amongst a wider group, to make for closer and more effective links between the leadership team and the classroom teachers. The behaviour policy is being reviewed to make it more effective. The leadership

group has established very appropriate priorities for the future development of the college and is in a strong position to take it forward. An essential next step, already planned, is to bring the staff and governors together to produce a vision statement that will become the focus for the development of an ethos for the college. At present, the widely separated college buildings and departments, as well as the lack of a large assembly area, leave the college without a clear identity. This has an adverse effect on pupils' attitudes and behaviour. The enlarged leadership team, however, is already showing itself to have a greater senior presence around the college, setting an example of conduct and behaviour and enforcing college rules.

79. The college development plans are very detailed and have been very effectively implemented. In the time that has passed since the previous report, it has been necessary and appropriate to prioritise, with the result that not all the key issues from that report have been fully addressed. Much of the development has been concentrated, correctly, on the raising of attainment, improvements in leadership, the professional development of teachers and the further development of teaching styles. The results are very positive, as can be shown in the significant improvement in GCSE examination results and in the quality of teaching since the last inspection.

80. The governing body has been largely reformed since 2000. It is now well equipped to monitor the work of the college and its finances. Governors visit the college regularly and are linked to subject departments. They have a very good understanding of the college's strengths and weaknesses and are taking a full role in long term strategic planning.

81. The quality of leadership provided by middle managers is variable though satisfactory overall. Most year and department heads monitor the work in their areas of responsibility and give good guidance and support to pupils and teachers. There are some departments, however, where the monitoring is unsatisfactory, either because the head of department is absent, temporary or does not fully understand this aspect of his or her role.

82. The management of pupils with special educational needs is good. The statutory requirements for pupils with a statement of special educational need are fully met. The funding received for these pupils is well spent. The majority of the money is used to fund teaching assistants. The governor for special educational needs has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of provision for these pupils. She liaises closely with the special educational needs co-ordinator and has completed the training for the new Code of Practice. The college has plans to ensure that all members of staff receive training in the new Code so that it can be fully implemented in September 2002.

83. New technology is used satisfactorily, both to assist in the administration of the college and to help in teaching. New developments are planned to make it even more effective, as more equipment becomes available. The administrative and clerical staff and the technicians support the teachers well to ensure that they can concentrate on their primary roles. The care taking and cleaning staff work effectively to ensure that the college buildings, some of which are of poor quality, are as clean and tidy as possible.

Staffing

84. The college has been through some difficult years due to staffing turnover and instability and has had difficulties finding subject specialists to ensure appropriate teaching and learning in areas such as English, modern foreign languages and mathematics. This has had an adverse effect on provision across all these courses. Recruitment has

improved and a number of well-qualified and often experienced teachers are in post, helping to ensure appropriate planning and curriculum development. The new stability is already assisting the college to raise standards and achievement and improve teaching and learning.

85. There is a developing programme of professional development for staff. Job descriptions of staff are currently being reviewed to ensure that all members of staff have the skills to do the tasks allocated. Under performance management arrangements, also being reviewed, every teacher has had an annual review meeting and has set objectives. Individual teachers' objectives relate to the departments' development plans as well as to their own professional development. Classroom observation is becoming established. The deployment of teachers contributes to the overall aims and objectives of the college. There is an appropriate level of support staffing, which enhances the work of teachers and contributes to the purposes of the college.

Learning Resources

86. There are adequate resources to support teaching and learning, and there have been satisfactory improvements since the last inspection in most subjects. The excellent range of keyboards and audio-visual equipment available in music greatly enhances pupils' learning. Good resources in physical education and drama support work in those areas. Most curriculum areas have an adequate stock of textbooks and some, like geography, mathematics and modern languages, have recently improved them considerably. There are, however, textbook shortages in design and technology and low funding leaves the department with limited consumable materials. The quality and quantity of books for pupils aged 11 to 14 is inadequate in English. Outdated books, in poor condition, do not provide adequate opportunities for pupils to become involved in additional reading. Resources for religious education are inadequate. This was a concern at the last inspection and little progress has been made.

87. Resources for ICT have improved in design and technology, where the upgrading of computers has allowed better use of them in pupils' project work. The availability of computers in physical education benefits the work of GCSE pupils, but a shortage of computers and appropriate software is affecting the range and quality of work in science and mathematics. The limited opportunity for pupils to use computers in art is shortly to be addressed. Systems for booking and using computer rooms do not allow ICT resources to be deployed in the most effective way. Audio-visual equipment has recently been improved in history and geography with the provision of new television and video facilities, but their effectiveness as an aid to teaching is impaired by inadequate blackout facilities in a number of rooms.

88. The library is managed as a joint facility between the college and community. It is well stocked, with a good range of reference books and general fiction. A good learning environment has been created, and pupils have good access to ICT facilities in adjacent rooms. However, the site of the library, some distance from the main campus, makes it inconvenient for pupils to make full use of it and limits its effectiveness as a resource. Good management by the librarian helps to overcome this by providing resource packs for project work in subject areas and by making good use of the school library service for similar purposes.

Accommodation

89. The Bideford College buildings vary in age and style. They comprise separate blocks spaced over a large campus. There is an old grammar school building, an older secondary modern school building and more recent blocks. These include some good buildings: a theatre and new facilities, mainly for science and art, which provide good quality accommodation that enhances learning.

90. It is a split site. The 'Geneva' block is ten minutes walk away. Although the building has character and potential, it is in poor condition. The distance from the main site results in much lost teaching time, with an adverse effect on standards in many subjects. Since the last inspection report, the college has made considerable efforts to improve the accommodation. There are good examples of this, for example, in art, music and science, but overall it is still unsatisfactory. There are shortages of adequate rooms in several subject areas, while many areas are in need of redecoration and there is a backlog of maintenance.

91. Accommodation is satisfactory in four subjects, but even in these there are problems. In English, learning in the 'huts' is affected by insufficient space for students, and they are often late and wet when they move to or from the huts. Areas such as the textile room are cramped when used by large groups. In history, accommodation is suitable, but the lack of blinds in a room in the Geneva building affects learning by preventing the use of overhead projectors.

92. Facilities in physical education are unsatisfactory and have serious shortcomings. The gymnasium is too small; the sports hall is in need of modernisation; the hard play area surfaces need repair, and the field suffers from a serious drainage problem that causes it to be waterlogged. Moreton Park, where lessons are held, is five minutes walk away, which results in lost teaching time. Mathematics rooms are scattered around the campus, which presents communication problems in a subject taught by 16 teachers. In geography, the lack of blinds and whiteboards affects learning. Music accommodation is very good, but lessons in a 'hut' are affected by lack of space, resulting in groups of students having to use a cupboard to play keyboards. This hut is due to be replaced by a purpose-built music area later this year. Accommodation is poor in modern foreign languages, where transfer to Geneva results in 10-12 minutes lost time in many lessons. Further time is lost in settling students down when it is wet and windy, and a lack of blinds makes the use of overhead projectors difficult or impossible. Although there is a theatre, there is no drama studio, resulting in lessons being taught in unsuitable accommodation. Overall, the appearance of the site is unsatisfactory and made worse by litter, which has to be picked up constantly by the members of the care taking staff, who do their best to maintain it.

The Sixth Form

93. Leadership and management of the Sixth Form are good. The current head of Sixth Form is a relatively new appointment. Governors are actively involved in the development of the Sixth Form, and the leadership team has a very clear vision and strategic plan for the future. The development plan has well thought out priorities and these are carefully costed. The philosophy, which is to maximise the quality of provision and increase recruitment, is well founded in the college as a whole. All students are provided with equal opportunities, and the curriculum is well managed to provide the closest fit to subject combinations.

94. The professional development for staff attached to Sixth Form work is satisfactory and improving, especially in the requirements for specific curricular initiatives such as vocational courses. Variations in the effectiveness of tutors and the limited provision of PSHE have yet to be rectified. In all other respects, staffing is good. Teachers are well qualified, deployed well and teaching their specialist subjects.

95. Accommodation in the Sixth Form is unsatisfactory. Rooms are allocated for Sixth Form use, but are in need of refurbishment and redecoration. Access to library resources and ICT facilities is difficult. The area lacks booths for individual study, so that the opportunities for independent work and quiet study are poor. The Sixth Form common room areas are in a terrible condition. The poor condition of the building is not conducive to learning and there are poor display facilities, even in the library. Stairways are in poor condition. There is unsatisfactory accommodation in design and technology and information and control technology because rooms are overcrowded and, in ITC, overheated. Facilities in English are inadequate because of the siting of the library, which is unsuitable for whole class teaching. Torn curtains in rooms have not been replaced for months. Although rooms are adequate in psychology, there is no base to hang pictures. In business education, the small size of the rooms makes them uncomfortable and there is inadequate storage.

96. Overall, resources are adequate. In departments such as science, equipment is new and modern, though ICT equipment is not yet sufficient for the Sixth Form generally. Staff members and qualifications are well matched to Sixth Form needs. The Sixth Form is cost effective in its use of staff.

WHAT SHOULD THE COLLEGE DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

This is an improving college. In order to continue to improve and to raise levels of attainment even further, the governors, principal and teaching staff, with the support of the LEA, should:

- Seek to improve the behaviour and attitudes of the minority of pupils who do not achieve well and disturb the learning of others.
- Use assessment information to set challenging and realistic targets for attainment for teachers and pupils, so that all teachers have high expectations of their pupils and plan their lessons in such a way that appropriately challenging work is set for all.
- Improve the monitoring of teaching and learning in those subject departments where it is unsatisfactory.
- Seek ways to remedy significant weaknesses in the quality of accommodation.

Minor issues

- The provision for ICT does not ensure that all pupils cover the required aspects of the subject in sufficient depth.
- Attendance levels are slightly below the national average.
- The literacy policy needs to be fully in place across the college.
- There is not a daily act of collective worship for all.

Sixth Form

- Meet the statutory requirement to teach religious education to all.
- Extend the provision of enrichment activities, PSHE, and key skills for all students.
- Remedy deficiencies in the quality of accommodation, especially the facilities for private study and access to ICT resources.
- Improve the unsatisfactory procedures for monitoring and recording attendance.
- Develop the provision and use of tutorial time, so that it is consistent and effective for all students.

PART C: COLLEGE DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	180
	Sixth Form	60
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		45

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7–11							
Number	2	41	73	51	12	1	0
Percentage	1	23	40	28	6.5	0.5	0
Sixth Form							
Number	2	19	28	10	1	0	0
Percentage	3	33	47	14	2	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for Years 7 - 11 and the Sixth Form here as each lesson represents more than percentage point.

Information about the college's pupils

Pupils on the college's roll

	Y7– Y11	Sixth Form
	1606	208
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free college meals	303	0

Special educational needs

	YR– Y11	Sixth Form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	59	0
Number of pupils on the college's special educational needs register	481	14

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	10

Pupil mobility in the last college year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the college other than at the usual time of first admission	80
Pupils who left the college other than at the usual time of leaving	104

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
College data	8.2
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
College data	1.7
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 (Year 9)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	135	176	311

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	56	88	87
	Girls	109	110	101
	Total	165	198	188
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	College	53(50)	64(61)	61(57)
	National	64(63)	66(65)	66(59)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	College	20(10)	38(35)	25(27)
	National	31(28)	43(42)	34(30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	62	86	97
	Girls	113	112	123
	Total	175	198	220
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	College	57(63)	64(62)	71(46)
	National	65(64)	68(66)	64(62)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	College	24(25)	36(34)	45(20)
	National	31(31)	42(39)	33(29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	151	157	308

GCSE results		5 or more grades A*-C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	54	125	139
	Girls	71	130	143
	Total	125	255	282
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	College	41(32)	83(87)	92(92)
	National	48(47)	91(91)	96(96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	College	34.6
	National	39.0

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

Attainment at the end of the Sixth Form (Year 13)

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
	2001	31	37	68

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	12.8	12.9	2.9	4.4	3.7
National	17.7	18.2	17.9	2.7	2.8	2.7

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	3
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	1
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	2
White	1616
Any other minority ethnic group	6

Exclusions in the last college year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	119	2
Other minority ethnic groups	13	3

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes:

Y7-Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	110.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.4

Education support staff:

Y7-Y13

Total number of education support staff	42
Total aggregate hours worked per week	1112

Deployment of teachers:

Y7-Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77.8
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Average teaching group size:

Y7-Y13

Key Stage 3	23
Key Stage 4	21
Key Stage 5	14.1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	4819384.00
Total expenditure	4699947.00
Expenditure per pupil	2601.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	-99416.00
Balance carried forward to next year	20021.00

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the college during the last two years	41.6
Number of teachers appointed to the college during the last two years	45.6

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	1.5
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	1.5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out
Number of questionnaires returned

1800
630

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes college.	21	60	13	4	1
My child is making good progress in college.	21	63	9	3	3
Behaviour in the college is good.	13	43	24	13	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	15	51	20	12	1
The teaching is good.	11	62	15	3	9
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	15	45	29	8	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the college with questions or a problem.	34	50	10	4	2
The college expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	32	55	9	2	2
The college works closely with parents.	13	48	26	8	6
The college is well led and managed.	16	52	13	5	14
The college is helping my child become mature and responsible.	20	55	15	4	6
The college provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	28	47	12	4	10

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

ENGLISH

Overall, the quality of provision in this subject is satisfactory.

Strengths:

- Teaching is good and pupils are now learning well.
- The newly formed team have a shared commitment to improve standards.
- The strategies to improve standards for pupils studying GCSE are already having an impact.

Areas for improvement:

- Strategies for developing the reading skills of all pupils.
- Assessment, including day-to-day marking and the use of assessment information to inform planning.
- Improve monitoring of pupils' achievement, particularly pupils aged up to 14 years, to identify pupils who are underachieving.
- Monitoring and evaluating the work of the department.
- Further development of the department's schemes of work to ensure a consistent approach to delivering the curriculum.

97. Standards of attainment in English on entry are well below national expectations. Standards at age 14 in the 2001 national tests in English were below average when compared to schools nationally, and below average when compared to similar schools. There was no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls. In general, the trend between 1996 and 2000 has been erratic, with the decline between 1998 and 2000 arrested by improvement in 2001. This trend in English does not follow the trends in either mathematics or science, which have been steadily upward. Inspection evidence confirms that standards overall in English are slightly below national expectations at the age of 14. The inspection discovered a very inconsistent picture. Staffing problems in the previous two years led to some pupils being taught by a number of different teachers. The newly appointed assistant principal is aware of these problems and has already developed an action plan to promote consistency of teaching in order to raise standards. Achievement at age 14 is satisfactory.

98. Standards in English language in GCSE examinations at age 16 were below average in 2001 compared with results nationally, but slightly above average when compared to similar schools. There was no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls. The 2001 results were an improvement on the 2000 results.

99. Standards in English literature in the GCSE examinations in 2001 were average when compared to schools nationally. Girls significantly out-performed boys. Achievement at the age of 16 in both English and English literature is good.

100. At the ages of 14 and 16, pupils with special educational needs achieve well and reach standards that are good in relation to their prior attainment. Pupils who have EAL also achieve well, reaching standards in line with expectations.

101. During the inspection, attainment in speaking and listening at the age of 14 was at least average and frequently better. An excellent example of how oral skills are developed was seen in a Year 7 discussion on 'Zoos'. In this lesson, pupils learned the skills of

collaboration and negotiation as they worked in pairs to identify the positive and negative aspects of keeping animals in captivity. Attainment in speaking and listening for pupils aged 16 is average and frequently better. In a Year 11 lesson, pupils confidently explored the language and structure of Simon Armitage's poem *Snow*. More able pupils lucidly expressed not only a detailed analysis of the poem but also a sensitive and empathetic personal response.

102. Inspection evidence indicates that attainment in reading is below national standards for pupils aged 14. The range of reading materials used is limited, and pupils' reading experience relies heavily on the texts used within lessons. Where the reading material is interesting, as in a Year 8 lesson on *The Ballard of Charlotte Dymond*, the pupils respond well by reading beyond the literal understanding of the story line to draw inferences about the characters. More able readers, in a Year 9 lesson on *Macbeth*, read fluently, explored vocabulary and were able to refer to textual evidence to support their viewpoint. In a lesson on *Macbeth*, pupils were able, after a close reading of a scene, to write monologues as if they were Lady Macbeth. In this lesson, the careful attention paid to language enabled them to understand Lady Macbeth's feelings, and pupils produced monologues that were both reflective and poignant.

103. Nevertheless, reading standards could be much higher. Although pupils have well designed reading records, these are not used consistently across the department. Reading is not effectively monitored, and time is not set aside to promote regular reading. Access to the college library is difficult and few pupils borrow books from it to read for pleasure. The good practice of using boxes of books in the English classrooms has ceased because of the high levels of loss. If standards in reading are to be raised, a secure whole college policy for reading is urgently needed and the unsatisfactory book stock replenished.

104. At the age of 16, attainment in reading is average. The more able pupils are able to understand different levels of meaning in texts studied. In a Year 11 lesson, pupils working on poetry from other cultures read with a good degree of perception and understanding. They demonstrated their ability to explore language devices and structure, producing high quality presentations as a result.

105. The standard of writing seen during the inspection indicated that attainment overall is below average for pupils aged 14. There is a wide diversity of standards across the teaching groups. Some teaching groups are given a good range of writing opportunities, which helps them to improve quickly. A good example of this was seen in a Year 8 lesson on *The Highwayman*. Pupils were able to respond well to a very challenging task because the teacher provided a carefully structured help-sheet. In a Year 9 lesson, some low attaining pupils were able to write interesting scripts based on three people being stuck in a lift. In this lesson, the writing task had been carefully sequenced and broken down into small sections to which all pupils were able to respond. However inspection of lesson folders for pupils aged 14 illustrated a very mixed picture. Short simple worksheets were prevalent in some classes, indicative of temporary teachers delivering single lessons. In these classes, little progress had been made in developing a range of writing skills, and there was a lack of extended pieces of writing. The senior managers are aware of the problems, which have arisen due to previous staffing difficulties, and these issues have been dealt with. A fully qualified and experienced team is now in place.

106. At the age of 16, standards in writing are close to average. However the attainment of pupils is inconsistent. In some groups, assignments are stimulating and imaginative, as in an excellent lesson on *Stephen's First Day* by James Joyce. In this lesson, the preparatory homework enabled pupils to write about Father Dolan in a detailed and analytical way. More able pupils confidently write in a variety of styles for a real audience, as in a Year 11 poem where a pupil writes about being trapped inside her emotions:

*'So many things unseen,
Trapped behind a mask that screams
False identity hides the confused soul
Feelings burn this heart of gold'.*

107. However, some higher attaining pupils in some groups are not achieving as well as their predicted grades would suggest. The department must concentrate on raising these standards. Some lower attaining pupils still find difficulty with accuracy in spelling and grammar. This frequently affects the clarity of their writing and hinders understanding. Despite these technical weaknesses, pupils are producing some imaginative pieces that clearly demonstrate an understanding of audience and purpose in their writing.

108. In GCSE coursework, there is a heavy reliance upon a written response to texts. This needs changing to embrace oral responses that will enable pupils of all abilities to achieve well. The media studies aspect of this course is also weak and is centred upon the analysis of printed advertisements. A move toward the analysis of moving images will broaden and develop skills in media analysis. There is evidence of pupils of all abilities drafting and redrafting their work, and this does contribute to higher standards.

109. Pupils have occasional opportunities to use information technology to enhance their presentation. In a Year 10 lesson, pupils were producing very professional leaflets to demonstrate their understanding of Simon Armitage's poem *Cataract*. This lesson provided a good example of technology used in conjunction with excellent teaching, and it motivated and challenged pupils. However, the overall provision for ICT in English is unsatisfactory.

110. The teaching was good overall in the lessons observed, with one fifth graded very good or excellent. These good standards in teaching are a strength of the department. Teachers displayed good subject knowledge and use their wide range of experience to extend their pupils' knowledge and understanding. However, best use is not made of this expertise. Even though individual lessons are well planned, departmental planning is weak. This has an adverse effect on continuity and progression in teaching, particularly for children aged 14 years. There is not a coherent approach to planning, nor systematic cross-moderation of the pupils' work.

111. The marking and assessing of pupils' work is often very thorough and helps them to develop and improve their work. However, this good practice is not consistent across the department, and much marking fails to either encourage or motivate pupils into learning from their mistakes. A more consistent approach to day-to-day marking needs to be established, and further monitoring of the department's assessment strategies needs to be implemented. This will help the good practice of sharing assessment criteria with pupils and using assessments to influence the planning of lessons, to take place uniformly across the department. This development has already started for pupils in Year 11 and is already raising standards.

112. The introduction of the literacy strategy has led to the good practice of teachers explaining to pupils what they expect them to learn at the beginning of the lesson and returning at the end of the lesson to check this learning has taken place. In such lessons, there is a move towards a shared learning experience, to which pupils respond well. In the more successful of these lessons, pupils are drawn into taking an active part because tasks are well structured and interesting. In the less successful lessons, as in a Year 11 lesson on poetry, the teacher laboriously analysed the poem and the pupils were reduced to simply note-taking. Pupils lost interest, and, as a result, no real understanding of the poem was gained.

113. In lessons observed, the pace was good and teachers had high expectations of their pupils. Teachers checked understanding and developed learning by using skilful questioning. A good example was a Year 9 lesson on *Macbeth*, in which pupils established a real understanding of Macbeth's role in the play. The questioning helped to develop self-confidence, and they were able to offer personal opinions based on the textual evidence. Pupils' behaviour is generally good in lessons. Their attitudes towards their work are positive. Pupils sustain concentration and are concerned about the quality of their work, especially those who experienced the recent staffing difficulties. Pupils were seen to be enjoying the subject and appreciating the work of their teachers.

114. Although the department has performance data available, its use as a tool for improving performance is very limited. Some 16 year-olds are not achieving as well as their predicted grades suggest. There needs to be further development in the interpretation of assessment data in order to identify areas of weakness in pupils' work. This was cited as an area for improvement in the last inspection. Since then there has been a little progress. The department has recently benefited from more detailed information, but has not analysed or incorporated it into curriculum planning.

115. Departmental planning is beginning to improve, but much more needs to be done to ensure uniformity of approach. There is still no effective system for monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning. This now needs to be put in place as a matter of urgency, because many of the inconsistencies in provision have arisen because the work of the department has not been rigorously monitored. The limited range of good quality texts for pupils up to the age of 14, cited in the last report, still needs to be rectified. Many resources are outdated and worn; the more popular texts are frequently insufficient in number for whole class teaching. All of this restricts teaching and pupils' learning. The provision for ICT is limited to eight opportunities per class per year in English, which is unsatisfactory. Overall improvements since the last inspection are unsatisfactory.

116. The English team is hardworking and enthusiastic, and shares a commitment to succeed. The department is now fully staffed with well-qualified and experienced teachers. Some of these teachers are recently appointed and bring to their posts a range of valuable experience.

LITERACY

117. There is not as yet a whole-college strategy for raising standards in literacy. A literacy co-ordinator was appointed in January and a staff meeting held to introduce the strategy. A literacy audit, although not the literacy strategy model, has taken place across all departments. It is envisaged that these results will inform the Literacy Action Plan in 2002, which will include a summer school and the introduction of progress units.

118. Standards of speaking and listening are generally satisfactory, and good in English. The best use of oral work was observed in mathematics and in PSHE, when a discussion on stereotyping and discrimination helped pupils understand these issues. However, in religious education, there were few opportunities for speaking and listening activities and opinions were not shared.

119. Standards of reading are generally satisfactory. Pupils in Bideford College read a good variety of texts across the curriculum. They read with a satisfactory level of understanding, both literal and inferential. They are able to select, retrieve and edit information. The best examples were in history and geography. However, there is no college strategy for reading, and the library is not used effectively because of its location.

120. Standards in writing vary across subject areas, but are generally satisfactory. Some subject areas have technical vocabulary displayed to assist the pupils' spelling. The best examples of these were English and geography. The weakest spelling was reported in ICT and design and technology. Pupils of all ages write in a variety of styles. The best examples of sustained pieces of writing were in English and history. In history, for example, pupils write in role to demonstrate their understanding of the slave trade. In English, there is evidence of pupils drafting and redrafting their work. Pupils are encouraged to write analytically and evaluatively in drama, using well prepared writing booklets.

121. The presentation of pupils' work is very variable. In the best examples, the pupils obviously take a pride in their work and take time to word-process pieces at home in order to improve presentation. Good examples were seen in physical education, English and art. However there were many examples of poor presentation and unfinished pieces of work, especially in some English groups.

MATHEMATICS

Overall, the provision in mathematics is good.

Strengths:

- Rising standards of attainment.
- Dynamic new leadership.
- The quality of the teaching.
- Very good new schemes of work.

Areas for improvement:

- No whole college numeracy policy.
- Limited use of ICT.
- Too little monitoring of teaching.

122. In the 2001 national tests for pupils aged 14, overall standards in mathematics were near the national average at both the standard and higher levels. When compared to schools with similar characteristics, standards are near the average for Level 5 but significantly higher for Level 6. The 2001 figure represents a slight improvement on that of the previous year. There is little difference in the performance of boys and girls. In terms of average points, pupils performed better in mathematics than in the other core subjects. The trend in the results shows a slow rise over time.

123. In the 2001 GCSE examinations, pupils attained below the national average for grades A* to C, with boys' attainment just below the average and girls significantly below it. The results are similar to those in science but better than in English. The results, however, represented a very significant improvement on those of the previous year, and were also significantly higher than those of schools whose pupils had similar attainment profiles at age 14.

124. Given that the entry profile to the college is well below the national average, pupils make good progress from the age of 11 to 14. Likewise, pupils in Year 11 last year also made good progress, compared with their attainment profile at age 14.

125. Inspection evidence confirms that standards are now near national averages at the ages of 14 and 16. No evidence was found to support underachievement by girls in the college. The generally good teaching and the recently appointed manager of the subject have undoubtedly helped to raise standards.

126. The department has seen major turmoil in terms of staffing in the past two years. The current 16 teachers of the subject include eight appointed within the past two years, including two temporary newly qualified teacher appointments and three non-specialist teachers. The head of department has been in post for just over five months, but has already overseen major changes in the department. There has been a move to more directed teaching and learning. The National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) three-part lesson structure has been adopted fully in Years 7 to 9 and partially in Years 10 and 11. These changes, alongside the staffing changes, have helped to raise standards. Pupils state that they prefer the more teacher-directed study and find the new lesson structure and materials interesting. The new schemes of work at both key stages, developed by the new head of department, have also been a big help to all teachers of the subject. These schemes make very effective use of the NNS and 'catch-up' materials.

127. By the age of 14, higher attaining pupils can formulate and solve simple algebraic equations with confidence. Middle attaining pupils can expand simple algebraic brackets easily, and lower attaining pupils can carry out geometric reflections of regular figures accurately. By age 16, higher attaining pupils use vectors confidently to represent geometric transformations. Middle attaining pupils can solve geometric problems involving tangents and chords to circles, and lower attaining pupils can calculate volumes of regular solids, though they struggle with problems involving fractions. The department is addressing this problem well by using the NNS lesson structure to exercise mental skills routinely in most lessons in all year groups.

128. The college is aware, however, of the need to adopt a whole-college numeracy policy at an early date. Plans are sensibly in hand, as part of the Key Stage 3 Strategy, to carry out an audit of numeracy use across the curriculum. Currently numeracy is supported in design and technology, geography, ICT, science and the vocational subjects. Pupils' oral work is generally good. They enjoy explaining their understanding of aspects of mathematics, and particularly appreciate coming to the board to do so. Teachers emphasise key works in many lessons, as poor reading and comprehension skills still have an undoubtedly negative effect on mathematical attainment.

129. Information and communication technology (ICT) is a very stimulating tool in helping the learning process, and ICT skills are used effectively in some lessons. Particularly good use was seen in a Year 8 class, where an ICT program was used to plot and analyse linear and non-linear graphs. In the lesson, pupils plotted and analysed nearly 30 graphs, which would have taken several lessons to achieve without ICT. The department is aware that use of ICT needs to be developed so that all pupils in a particular year group get a similar diet. There is also a need to give some staff further training in ICT.

130. All pupils are looked after as individuals in lessons. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. One Year 7 class of such pupils made particularly good progress in their understanding of money, using a Valentine's Day promotional flyer as a resource. Gifted pupils are challenged with extension materials in some lessons and are encouraged to enter national competitions. All pupils enjoy using 'real world' data. The department offers help at lunchtime and outside college hours, with revision sessions and the weekly maths club. Pupils use calculators appropriately and accurately, but teachers also sensibly encourage the development of estimating skills. Particularly appropriate use of the calculator was seen where a higher attaining Year 11 group solved quadratic equations by 'trial and improve' methods. These pupils learned quickly because they found the manual process of iteration by hand was very tedious compared to the simple

programmed use of the calculator. When learning is less successful, teachers let the pace of the lesson fall off or spend too much time on one activity. This was seen in a lower attaining Year 9 class, where the 'starter' part of the lesson, intended to last five minutes, went on for thirty minutes.

131. All teaching is at least satisfactory, with most of it good and, occasionally, very good. This is a major improvement on the previous inspection. Teachers have adopted three-part lessons enthusiastically, and keep up a good pace in lessons as a result. Particularly successful teaching often arises from probing, structured questioning. This was seen in a Year 9 middle attaining class, estimating the areas of annular rings. The teacher got the pupils to develop their solutions to the problem by appropriate encouraging but demanding, questioning. In another successful Year 10 lesson, the teacher achieved particularly good understanding of the solution of simultaneous equations by getting pupils to solve them at the board. This form of teaching motivates and encourages pupils to learn. In the isolated less successful lessons, planning does not always provide enough challenge for all pupils. As a result, their attention tends to drift. A key feature of much teaching in the college is the ability of teachers to help in a non-threatening fashion. This was illustrated in a lower attaining Year 11 class, on rearranging algebraic formulae. The teacher explained the procedure in three different ways to ensure understanding by all pupils in the group. In response to such teaching, pupils' learning in lessons is generally good. The vast majority are well behaved and motivated. In discussion, many say that they enjoy learning mathematics. They enjoy learning new techniques and applying them successfully to problems.

132. The subject is well managed by a very hard working professional who has developed a very effective team spirit amongst her very new team in a very short period of time. She is aware of the many tasks still to be tackled, but has made a very good start to solving the problems highlighted by the previous inspection. Standards in the subject are currently affected by timetabling problems for a few classes. The present accommodation for the subject is also very undesirable, with classes in several parts of the college. This means that pupils and staff in these areas feel isolated from the main mathematics area, and standards suffer in consequence. Overall the department has made good progress since the previous inspection.

NUMERACY

133. More than one third of pupils arriving in Year 7 have a mathematics National Curriculum Level below the national average. The college is partially addressing this problem by using the National Numeracy Strategy lesson structure, which incorporates a short sharp session on mental skills into the majority of lessons. The college is sensibly in the process of auditing the numeracy requirements of all subjects, before introducing a whole-college numeracy policy in conjunction with the new Key Stage 3 Strategy. At present, numeracy skills are learned effectively in science for data handling and evaluation of formulae, and in geography for the statistical analysis of data and data display. Necessary skills are taught well in ICT, for evaluating formulae in spreadsheets, in design and technology for measurement and estimation, and in the vocational subjects for data analysis and presentation.

SCIENCE

Overall, the quality of provision in science is satisfactory.

Strengths:

- Standards of attainment at age 16, whilst close to national average, are well above the average of similar schools.
- Pupils achieve well from age 14 to 16.
- Relationships between pupils and teachers are good.
- Quality of teaching is good, with strong subject expertise and high expectations being notable features.

Areas for improvement:

- Standards reached by pupils at age 14.
- Maturity of behaviour, mainly of boys aged 11 to 14.
- Teaching of literacy, numeracy and ICT in science.
- Planning for the full range of attainment within groups.
- Use of assessment data to identify and support underachieving pupils.
- Monitoring of teaching and learning.

134. Attainment in science was below average in the most recent national tests at age 14. In 2001, both the proportion of pupils gaining Level 5 or higher and the average points score were below national averages. They were close to the averages in similar schools. Girls performed better than boys. Overall attainment has declined over the past three years, due to a fall in the performance of boys. Overall, pupils' achievement from the age of 11 to 14 has been satisfactory, because attainment on entry in Year 7 has also been below average in science. At the age of 16, pupils' attainment in the GCSE examinations in 2001 was consistent with the national average in both combined and separate sciences, but well above the average of similar schools. Pupils achieved well from age 14 to 16, with little variation between boys and girls. Standards have risen over the past three years, and particularly in the last year.

135. In work seen during the inspection, attainment at the age of 14 reflects the standards found in the recent tests, being overall below the national average. In lessons observed, pupils gained an understanding of basic concepts, such as the construction and testing of electromagnets, but few related this to magnetic fields. Standards of literacy are weak and hinder the progress of some pupils. Numeracy standards are also below those expected for this age, and their ICT skills are not well developed. From evidence in books, most pupils from the age of 11 to 14 develop a better understanding of biology, chemistry and physics, as well as improving their practical skills at a satisfactory rate. Progress, however, is affected by the immature behaviour of a minority of boys. Pupils with special educational needs make progress consistent with others where there is group work, so that peer support is effective, or the teacher gives them significant individual support, as is often the case. Higher attaining pupils do not always make enough progress, because the level of challenge is not sufficiently high for these pupils.

136. The work of pupils aged 16 meets national expectations. Boys are working at a similar level to girls. More pupils have a greater depth of understanding and can apply their knowledge to problems such as the measurement of wave frequency using a cathode ray oscilloscope. They use equipment sensibly, recording measurements with care, and a minority carry out the calculation with success. Work analysed in pupils' books indicates good advances in all three areas of science in Years 10 and 11. Progress is better than the earlier years overall, in response to the higher degree of challenge and improved behaviour.

Nevertheless, standards of literacy and numeracy remain below expectation for this age group, and the infrequent use of ICT leaves these skills underdeveloped.

137. The quality of teaching and learning in science is good. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and expertise. Lessons are planned satisfactorily to match the requirements of the National Curriculum, and include a significant amount of practical work. Insufficient time, however, is given to developing basic skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT. Expectations are high overall, although not enough attention is given to the matching of tasks to the different levels of attainment within the groups. Similarly, there are limited, specific, written resources for pupils with special educational needs. Lessons are well organised, and behaviour, including excessive immaturity, is managed well to maintain progress. Support for individual pupils is very good. Questioning techniques are used well by most, but not all, teachers to draw out ideas, ensure participation by all pupils and identify underachievement. Pupils' attitudes to work are good overall, resulting in good progress being made. Relationships are also good, so pupils are willing to ask questions and the learning atmosphere is positive. They co-operate enthusiastically on practical tasks and, as a result, ideas are shared and skills, such as teamwork, are developed well. In a number of classes, mainly in Years 7 to 9, behaviour can become unsatisfactory. A significant minority of pupils is immature and this affects the progress of others. Many pupils take pride in their work, but their weak literacy skills affect the quality of presentation.

138. Management and leadership of the three sections of the science department are satisfactory. There are strengths in the high degree of subject specialisation, in terms of planning and organisation, but there is also unnecessary variation. As reported in the previous inspection, information is not readily shared, and there are inconsistencies in provision. Schemes of work are slow in development; handbooks and policies are not sufficiently comprehensive and up-to-date. Monitoring is too informal and lacks the rigour needed to identify strengths and weakness in teaching. Resources are managed well, but there is inadequate availability of computers resulting in unsatisfactory progress in use of ICT. New accommodation for science provides a pleasing and stimulating environment. Other accommodation for science is adequate but situated in widely separated blocks. This can adversely affect the opportunities for practical work and the use of technician time.

139. Overall, improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Standards of attainment at the age of 16 have risen in relation to the national average. Those at 14 have remained in line with similar schools, just below the national average. Overall, teaching remains good. Pupils' attitudes remain positively enthusiastic, although there remain concerns over the behaviour of younger boys. Work is in hand to improve schemes of work and assessment practices. Not enough progress has been made on the monitoring of teaching and learning.

ART

The provision for art is very good.

Strengths:

- The very good teaching, particularly in Years 7 and 9.
- The generally very positive attitudes that pupils have towards the subject and their good behaviour in lessons.
- The very good leadership of a strong teaching team.
- The well-balanced curriculum, with strong cultural and fine art elements and very good opportunities to work in a wide range of media.

Areas for improvement:

- The provision and use of computers and associated art hardware and software.
- The accommodation for ceramics.
- The use of National Curriculum Levels to assess standards and guide planning of lessons.

140. Standards by age 14 are broadly consistent with national expectations. Pupils arrive at the college with a varied experience of art that is generally below national expectations. They make rapid progress through the well-planned courses in basic art skills in Year 7. These courses are now well established, having suffered from departmental changes in recent years. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 are not accurate, but the head of department is in the process of linking assessments to National Curriculum Levels more closely. By the age of 16, standards are below national averages in GCSE examination passes. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have not benefited from the very good grounding in basic skills that is now taking place in Year 7. Standards have fluctuated in recent years as the department has struggled through a period of change and uncertainty. Many pupils in Year 11 have become disaffected with the subject. However, it is to the credit of the department that most of these pupils apply themselves well to the practical work required for the GCSE examination. The weak research and literacy skills at this stage are evident in many sketchbooks and are having a negative effect on examination results.

141. In work seen during the inspection, attainment at the age of 14 is consistent with national expectations. In Year 7, pupils can identify the work of Andy Warhol and comment on his use of colour to create mood in his paintings. The challenging work enables them to make very good progress with their drawing skills through observational studies. They learn to handle paintbrushes to create different effects, such as 'hard edge', 'feathering' and 'infill'. This develops well from the mark-making exercises used to understand textures that can be made using different grades of pencil. Year 8 pupils learn to cut card of different strengths, carefully and safely, constructing forms based on the work of Fernand Leger. Less able pupils find difficulty in cutting corrugated card and do not build the curvilinear forms that they have designed. Pupils in Year 9 research hieroglyphics and combine them with their own symbols to decorate the canopic funerary jars they have designed. They use oil pastels well to create colourful and vibrant designs. They learn about the religious and cultural significance of the Mexican 'Day of the Dead' festival. Imaginative use is made of given and found resources to construct the 'dancing skeletons' they have designed from a study of the festival. In constructing small and large-scale totem poles in card, they learn something of the background to the North American totemic culture.

142. In work seen, the attainment of pupils by the age of 16 is below national expectations, reflecting the below standard GCSE results. This is largely a result of the unstable conditions under which the department has had to work for several years. There have been many staff changes, including those at head of department level, and the department has

only very recently moved into its new, very good quality accommodation. The teaching of basic art skills in Years 7 and 8 has not been coherent and, in the current Years 10 and 11, there are many deficiencies in drawing, painting and constructional skills evident in ongoing work. More able pupils use an ink pen to draw and add texture to their observational studies. They experiment confidently with oil pastel, wax crayon, pencil and ink, creating colourful mixed-media tessellations, based on a study of the work of Klimt, Page and O'Keefe. A visit to the Eden Project in Cornwall was the primary inspiration for their work. Pupils with special educational needs settle well into lessons and make very good progress against both their personal and the lesson targets. In Year 11, pupils learn the language of art criticism in well planned fine art lessons, and learn to use it in evaluating their own work and in discussing the work of important artists. More able pupils pursue their studies with determination, looking towards a good grade in the GCSE examination. Significant numbers of pupils are reluctant to contribute effectively to the lessons, although they do not disrupt the efforts of those who wish to progress with their work.

143. With the exception of the occasional lesson in Year 8, pupils are generally well behaved and positive in their attitudes towards their work. They are polite and well motivated, and enjoy good relationships with each other and with teachers. In one lesson in Year 10, where there was a high proportion of pupils with special needs, all pupils worked hard and were fully included in the lesson, making good progress with their work. A significant number of pupils in Year 11 lack motivation and are clearly disaffected with college, though they do not impede the progress of those who wish to do well.

144. The deputy head of department began the process of stabilisation whilst she was the acting head of art, and this process has been consolidated with the appointment of a permanent head of department. The teaching team is now strong, well qualified and experienced, and the department is enjoying the stability that will enable it to build on its present strengths and make further improvements in future years. The well-informed and experienced technician offers valued support to the department. Many improvements have been made since the last inspection, including four new art rooms, although the ceramics room remains unsatisfactory in its present location, and the department computer suite has yet to be resourced with computers and appropriate software. Pupils have the opportunity to choose from four examinations at GCSE Level, including an unendorsed paper. This enables the department to offer a rich and varied experience of art in Years 10 and 11. With the high level of very good teaching and the very good leadership and management of the strong teaching team, the department is well placed to raise standards above national expectations in the coming years.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths:

- Good teaching leads to positive working relationships and enables pupils to learn well.
- Very good GCSE results in textiles, graphics and food.
- Strong assessment procedures give a good sense of direction to pupils' work.

Areas for improvement:

- Standards of work in resistant materials.
- The effective use of homework to develop pupils' independent learning skills.
- The provision of consumable resources and textbooks.

145. Attainment for pupils at the age of 14, measured by teacher assessments, is just below average. GCSE examination results are above average. Sixty per cent of pupils gained A* to C grades in 2001, against a national average of 50 per cent. Textiles, graphics and food results were well above average. Whilst electronics and resistant materials results were below average, pupils' performance was in line with their prior attainment in the subject. Comparative figures indicate that pupils' achievements in design and technology are higher than in many other examination subjects. Girls perform better than boys.

146. In work seen, standards at age 14 are average. Pupils are introduced to good design methodology in Year 7 and build up basic skills throughout the key stage. Higher attaining pupils are able to apply such skills independently. For example, Year 9 graphics pupils were able to use two and three-dimensional drawings to develop ideas for a mobile 'phone and translate them into models. The quality of response from lower attaining pupils was not high, but they were beginning to think in a 'designerly' way. Pupils work better in a practical situation. Year 9 pupils in food technology, for example, worked with good self-organisation to prepare and bake American-style muffins. The pace of the lesson slowed, however, as pupils changed to the task of evaluating their work, and the quality of written work did not match their practical skills. One pupil with special educational needs was fully included in the lesson and, with help from both teacher and learning support assistant, was able to complete the task successfully and with obvious pride. Low literacy skills affect the standard of work of many pupils, preventing them from writing extended evaluations of their work or compiling sophisticated design specifications. Information and communication technology (ICT) skills are regularly being integrated into project work. Where pupils use computers, this improves both the content and presentation of their work. For example, all pupils in a Year 7 textiles group, many of whom had special educational needs, were able to use computers to assemble a resource sheet of pictorial images and use it as stimulus for a wall-hanging project. Pupils achieve well and make good progress in relation to their low Level of ability on entry to the college.

147. The attainment of pupils aged 16 is above average. Most are able to build on positive earlier experiences and work with a greater degree of independence. In some areas, notably textiles, standards are well above average. Some GCSE folders in textiles, for example, contain detailed research and analysis, imaginative ideas and well-constructed design briefs, indicating a thorough understanding of design processes. Project folders are presented to a high standard, using a good balance of hand-drawn and computer-generated techniques. Designing skills are matched by good practical skills. Year 11 pupils, for example, were using a wide range of hand and machine stitching techniques to manufacture a variety of challenging projects, from ball gowns to soft furnishings.

148. Standards in resistant materials are low. Design folders indicate shallow research, simplistic design briefs and poorly drafted specifications. Graphic work does not contain sufficient detail for manufacture to take place accurately, and many practical outcomes are of poor quality. For example, a Year 10 storage project did not allow pupils the opportunity to develop higher order skills. Projects were assembled in crude ways and painted to a poor standard. In contrast to the high standards attained in previous years, current standards for Year 11 graphic products pupils are below average. Because independent learning skills are not sufficiently well developed, pupils require considerable guidance from teachers. Despite this, pupils are attaining results in line with their predicted GCSE grades. Scrutiny of Year 10 graphic products folders indicates that the standard of work is high. Some electronics pupils use their folders as developmental sketchbooks, clearly recording design ideas and illustrating logical progression through a project. Because pupils with special educational needs are given good support, they are able to gain great benefit from technology work and make good progress. For example, a Year 10 pupil with hearing impairment successfully prepared paella from a recipe he had compiled from his research into its country of origin.

149. Teaching is good or better in more than two-thirds of lessons, and satisfactory in the remainder. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. Teachers' high Level of commitment to planning

work that is in the best interests of pupils produces an equally high response from pupils. Many lessons start early or continue after normal finishing times, and there is a high uptake for additional sessions after school. Teachers work hard to develop good working relationships and this contributes to the positive learning taking place in most lessons. For example, a well-planned introductory resistant materials lesson resulted in Year 7 pupils understanding the role of research, testing and experimenting in designing and making. Their numeracy skills were strengthened as they used practical methods to determine the optimum angle for coins to roll down a slope. As a result, one lower achieving pupil realised that the angle of inclination does not change at different points on the slope. Very good teaching was characterised by high expectations of pupils. For example, the teacher of a Year 11 textiles group assumed that pupils would give of their best, and reflected this in the way she outlined the lesson objectives. Working procedures have been well established so that most pupils know what is expected of them. Teachers' good management of pupils, as they undertake a wide range of practical tasks, leads to safe, organised working, low Levels of unnecessary noise and a concern for careful work. Where teaching is satisfactory, the atmosphere for learning is less positive because of the absence of one or more of these strategies. For example, a more rigorous application of the agreed procedures for monitoring progress would involve Year 10 and 11 pupils more fully in their resistant materials projects, and give them a greater sense of direction and involvement in their own learning. Homework tasks often support work in lessons, but are not always used to maximum effect as a way of developing pupils' independent learning skills. The quality of teaching has been monitored and the further development of this will be a key factor in spreading good practice. Teachers are good at encouraging and extending pupils with the potential for higher attainment, but, as yet, there are no specific strategies for identifying those pupils with exceptional talent.

150. Leadership and management are good. The department is emerging from a period of disruption caused by staff changes, and now faces a more settled period of development. A revised management structure has enabled more effective delegation of responsibilities. Planning is now good and schemes of work have been thoroughly revised to include opportunities for developing literacy and numeracy. There is a clear sense of direction and a shared desire for improvement. Good use is made of a talented group of part-time teachers, and good co-operation ensures that continuity of work for pupils is maintained. The quality of teaching provided by an experienced though unqualified teacher contributes significantly to high standards in textiles. Teaching has been strengthened by the appointment of new staff, including a newly qualified teacher who has been given good support and makes a valued contribution. The effectiveness of teachers is enhanced by good technician support.

151. The curriculum is broad and balanced at both key stages, and provides opportunities for some lower attaining pupils to gain accreditation through Certificate of Achievement. Recent changes have attempted to make Year 9 courses more relevant to pupils' needs and form a better basis from which to begin option courses. This, together with an experimental scheme to teach Year 8 pupils in separate boys' and girls' groups, will require careful monitoring to evaluate the educational benefits. A GCSE course in child development is a valuable additional option and, whilst results have not been high, it makes a significant contribution to pupils' social, moral and cultural development. Revised assessment procedures have improved the tracking of pupils' progress, and a group tutor system has enabled pupil targets to be set and monitored. The tracking of progress for Year 10 and 11 pupils is thorough, and pupils receive detailed information to enable them to improve.

152. Accommodation is adequate for present needs and includes specialist areas for computer-aided design and manufacture. Computers and associated software have been updated, but textbooks and consumable materials are insufficient. Since the last inspection, there have been good improvements in the quality of teaching and planning, assessment procedures, ICT facilities, a shared view of design and technology, and in examination results.

GEOGRAPHY

Overall the quality of provision is satisfactory.

Strengths:

- Teaching is good overall for pupils in Years 10-11.
- Very good quality coursework for the GCSE examination.
- Good numeracy teaching.
- Leadership is enthusiastic and knowledgeable.

Areas for improvement:

- Strategies to fully address the needs of all pupils, especially in Years 7 - 9.
- Schemes of work to include literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.
- Provision for a fieldwork experience in Years 8 or 9 to ensure wider experiences and primary research opportunities.
- The department handbook.

153. Attainment at age 14 is below the national expectation. In 2001, 48 per cent of pupils gained National Curriculum Levels 5 and above, compared with the national average of 64 per cent. Girls' results are much better than those of boys, but results overall have been falling since 1999. This is partly due to staffing difficulties. However, by age 16, standards are in line with national averages, and, 58.4 per cent of pupils gained grades A*-C in GCSE examinations in 2001. These results are an improvement on the results for 2000 and reflect hard work by department staff. Girls' results in 2001 were significantly better than those for boys, being well above the national average. In work seen, achievement by age 14 is satisfactory and by age 16 it is good. This reflects good lesson planning and good resource use, to develop pupils' geographical skills and knowledge.

154. Inspection evidence indicates that attainment is close to national expectations by age 14. Work seen in pupils' books indicates satisfactory numeracy and map and atlas work. Work on display and in books demonstrates satisfactory knowledge. In lessons seen, good paired and group work illustrated pupils' ability to discuss their work and demonstrate satisfactory to good understanding. Lower attaining pupils are supported by their peers in these activities, but they need more literacy support to help them to concentrate on written tasks. In Year 7, high and average attaining pupils describe isobar patterns competently on a worksheet and can draw wind movements on the patterns. They understand and can describe asymmetric patterns. The less able pupils have difficulties in understanding and require additional tasks and literacy support to consolidate what they have done.

155. By the age of 16, attainment is just above national expectations. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. Some successfully take the GCSE course, whilst others choose the Certificate of Achievement course. For all pupils, completed GCSE coursework is satisfactory to very good, reflecting the well-planned fieldwork activities and supportive teaching. Numeracy is good and pupils use a variety of skills and resources well. There is evidence of very good detailed written work from high attainers, with ideas and methods well linked to judgements and conclusions. Low attainers write brief answers with less detail. Coursework for these pupils shows satisfactory data collection and graph work, but their ability to analyse and come to meaningful conclusions from the data is in need of further development: it is below average. In the work that was scrutinised for the inspection, the judgements that these pupils had come to were not linked well to the evidence they had found and literacy problems remain.

156. Attitudes are satisfactory overall. Many pupils have good attitudes to the subject and show great interest. In most lessons, pupils work well together. In a Year 7 lesson on weather, small groups of pupils visited various sites on the college campus to make recordings. This was done very well. Fieldwork for older pupils shows clear evidence of good group work. In some lessons, a small number of pupils are noisy and demanding, usually despite determined attempts at behaviour management by the teacher. This leads to loss of pace in lessons and disturbs concentration. There are lessons in which behaviour is unsatisfactory, and the department needs improved behaviour management strategies, especially to support newly qualified teachers.

157. Teaching is satisfactory overall and good for GCSE pupils. Unsatisfactory teaching was seen in only one lesson out of 12 observed and this was because of too much time taken up by the teachers' explanations, resulting in insufficient involvement from the pupils. All lessons showed evidence of good planning and a variety of tasks. In the best lessons, the activities are varied with good use of resources and the teacher checking on progress before introducing further work. In a Year 9 introductory lesson on Brazil, the teacher showed various items from a supermarket and pupils tried to identify the country of origin. This both motivated and excited the pupils. The remainder of the lesson included oral and written work using atlases and maps. Such good use of resources is a feature of work in the department. There was good pace and lower attaining pupils received support from the teacher. In a very good Year 11 lesson, the teacher celebrated the arrival of GCSE examination resources as an exciting event. Her infectious enthusiasm and confidence in their abilities to do well motivated all the pupils. The department makes good use of group work to involve pupils in their learning. In a Year 10 lesson, good group work was observed on population distribution, with regular intervention by the teacher to develop the tasks and ensure good written work. Lower attaining pupils made satisfactory progress, with group support. Marking is satisfactory overall, but more input is needed from some teachers to help and encourage pupils to make progress. Numeracy in Years 7 - 9 is satisfactory and good in Years 10 -11. There is some good use of ICT by pupils, but ICT is not used frequently enough.

158. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. The subject leader is enthusiastic and department staff work well together. Pupils' assessments are regular and standardised, and assessment recording is well established. Although standards have fallen since the last inspection, staffing has stabilised and results are likely to improve. Classroom and corridor displays are good, but some classrooms need whiteboards and blinds to enable videos and overhead projectors to be used.

159. Since the last inspection, girls' results have improved and teaching is now good in Years 10 and 11. Assessment procedures have improved; GCSE coursework is now very good and challenge in most lessons is good. There is a need to include more fieldwork in Years 7 to 9 to challenge and develop pupils' practical skills. Literacy strategies need to be developed as a priority and ICT needs specific inclusion in schemes of work. Assessment data now needs to be used to monitor pupils' progress.

HISTORY

In history, the quality of provision is good.

Strengths:

- The quality of teaching and learning.
- Leadership and management.
- Improved attainment at GCSE.

Areas for improvement:

- The range of teaching styles to challenge the more able and encourage greater independence in learning.
- Opportunities for using ICT skills consistently across the whole curriculum.
- The quality and consistency of marking so it is simpler for pupils to understand and to reduce their errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

160. The attainment of pupils at the end of Year 9, as measured by teachers' assessments, has apparently fallen over the last three years; in reality, previous assessments were over-estimates. In 2001, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected levels was below the national average by eight percentage points. The difference between the performance of boys and girls is almost exactly the same as it is nationally.

161. Attainment in the GCSE examinations over the last three years has improved from well below to just below the national average. In 2001, half of all pupils gained passes at grades A*-C, compared to 57.5 per cent nationally. Both girls and boys had lower average points scores in history than in the combined totals of their other subjects, as is the case nationally. The main discrepancy is in the proportions of pupils obtaining the top two grades; the proportion of girls reaching this level is 53 per cent of the national figure, but in the case of boys, it is less than 20 per cent.

162. Standards at age 14 are below the national average. The major reason for this is attainment on entry, which is well below average for a significant proportion of pupils. Pupils have a detailed knowledge of a limited range of events and developments in the past. They are making good progress in selecting evidence from a range of sources in order to confront a historical problem, for example, whether Elizabeth 1 should marry Philip of Spain. Literacy is improving through drafting and redrafting in extended writing, a greater focus on key words, the use of writing frames, and reading aloud. Lower attaining pupils do not always complete their work and make too many errors in spelling and grammar, which sometimes go uncorrected. In Year 9, pupils of all ability levels clearly explain the causes of the First World War, although pupils' writing occasionally contains inaccuracies and generalities. Higher attaining pupils undertake good quality extended writing in explaining how the Nazis gained control of Germany. In lessons seen, pupils could comment on the religious overtones in a poster of Hitler, and explain why the Catholic Church represented an implicit threat. Given the constraints of curriculum time and their low attainment on entry, pupils achieve well overall, although there is scope for offering greater challenge to potentially higher attaining pupils.

163. At the age of 16, standards of work seen are close to national expectations. However, as is exemplified by the very few A* grades in GCSE examinations, there are relatively few higher attaining pupils. Most pupils express themselves well in writing, although they are prone to making errors in the technical accuracy of their written English. Early in the course they practise extended writing, on topics such as the factors behind Britain's industrialisation. They acquire skills in ICT in researching and word-processing well-argued assignments, such as on the importance of the Match Girls' strike and the political factors underlying the granting of the vote to women. They make full and detailed

notes on a range of topics, although some, such as the building of the canals and railways, would benefit from the wider use of appropriate maps, diagrams and chronology. The department has used assessment information well to identify weaknesses in source handling as one of the areas limiting pupils' attainment. In a Year 11 lesson seen on nursing in the 19th century, most pupils made good progress in source analysis. However, some lower attaining pupils found difficulty with the conceptual and organisational skills needed to interrogate and evaluate sources, and relate their provenance to the questions set. Standards have improved since the last report and achievement is good.

164. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11 is good; there was no unsatisfactory teaching seen. Teachers have detailed subject knowledge, which, combined with clear explanation and high expectations, results in good learning. Question and answer is well used to challenge, consolidate and extend pupils' knowledge, as in a Year 9 lesson on Nazi propaganda, where the teacher's enthusiasm and encouragement for pupils to venture their own answers led to good progress. Where teaching and learning are no more than satisfactory, a lack of clarity and consistency in expectations, missed opportunities to extend knowledge, and late starts to lessons restrict progress. Even in lessons where teaching is good, a tendency towards didacticism and not sharing lesson aims with pupils can undermine their independence. More attention to chronology would enhance the subject's contribution to the teaching of numeracy. Teachers plan and structure their lessons well. They combine a good knowledge of and support for individual pupils with skilful classroom management to achieve good learning. In a Year 8 lesson on the Gunpowder Plot, a hearing-impaired pupil with special educational needs learned well as a result of the strengths outlined above, supplemented by close liaison with the support teacher. For older pupils, teachers provide sound advice on examination and source handling skills, which is one reason why attainment at GCSE Level has improved.

165. Pupils respond positively to the opportunities offered. With few exceptions, they are attentive and co-operative; most contribute willingly to lessons and listen carefully to each other's opinions. Good-humoured relations and mutual respect between teachers and pupils lead to a productive atmosphere for learning. Occasionally, individual pupils are inattentive and teachers need to be more forceful in asserting their authority.

166. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The head of department has a clear view of the department's strengths and weaknesses. Detailed planning is addressing the latter. For example, the integration of ICT opportunities into schemes of work is well under way. She has been able to build up a good stock of resources through astute financial management. New teachers have been well monitored and supported. Teachers work closely together, though the remote location of the other history teaching room impedes effective collaboration and monitoring.

167. The department has improved well since the last inspection. The quality of teaching and learning has improved, as has the key indicator of attainment at GCSE. Although achievement is now good, some areas remain to be addressed. These include a greater variety of teaching and learning styles to be implemented and improving the consistency and quality of marking.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

The provision for ICT is unsatisfactory.

Strengths:

- The hard working, competent and dedicated head of department.
- Inclusion of all pupils.

Areas for improvement:

- The frequency of assessment.
- The co-ordination of ICT across the curriculum.
- Statutory requirements are not met.
- Resources.

168. In each year up to 2000, teachers' annual assessments of standards at age 14 showed that fewer than 40 per cent of pupils reached the target of Level 5, compared with around 60 per cent nationally. In 2001, however, there was an improvement to just over 50 per cent.

169. Assessment of the ICT skills, knowledge and understanding of pupils in Years 7 to 9 during the inspection consisted of the observation of lessons, study of their ICT folders and work in other subjects, and talking with very many of them in lessons. Pupils' attainment met national expectations in no more than a third of the lessons seen, and it was below expectations in all others. Most but not all pupils have an adequate grasp of working with computers, including use of the mouse, icons, files and printers. While most have a basic competence in word processing, few know what word processors are actually for, or are able to list their main advantages over other methods of producing and communicating text. Hardly any can produce accurate, attractive documents at any speed. The relevant knowledge of pupils in Years 7 to 9 is generally low. For instance, few can explain one abuse of personal data or one use of bar codes, or say why chain stores have loyalty cards.

170. Until this year, there was no discrete teaching of ICT in Years 10 and 11. Now the subject is available in the options scheme, and several Year 10 classes are preparing for their GCSE examination. Their attainment is below average overall as a result of the low levels of contact they have had with ICT teaching in the past. However, while their skills, knowledge and understanding are not up to national levels, they are generally better than those of the pupils in Years 10 and 11 who do not study the subject. Among that last group, fluent and accurate typists are very rare. They have little useful grasp of the use of spreadsheets and data base management software, and little knowledge of uses of ICT in the 'real world'.

171. Overall the work of the pupils in Years 7 to 11 is below average, and their level of achievement is unsatisfactory. There is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls. However, learners with special educational needs generally achieve and learn well. In the Sixth Form, the students' standards of work and levels of achievement are generally satisfactory.

172. Teaching is good overall, though there was some unsatisfactory teaching in the lower school during inspection week. In Years 10 to 13, teaching was always satisfactory or better. Almost all the teachers have a very good grasp of the subject and good experience of it outside education. They generally plan well and make use of a good range of resources. For instance, the lessons of one teacher commonly make use of several programs running through a data projector, different sets of materials on display on the

classroom walls, a range of worksheets and reference sheets, and clear references to ICT in “real life”. The same teacher takes positive steps to ensure that pupils share the computers fairly. The main aspect of good practice still to be developed, throughout the department is in planning lessons based on clear learning objectives.

173. The low standards in ICT in Years 7 to 11 result from the low level of opportunity for the learners to develop competence in the various aspects of the subject set out in the National Curriculum. Schemes of work are now coming into place that could enable the pupils in Years 7 to 9 to meet those different aspects. However, the work in ICT in other subjects is not mapped against the ICT National Curriculum or co-ordinated against what is happening in the actual ICT lessons. Assessment of the pupils is infrequent.

174. The college does not yet meet the requirements of the National Curriculum in this subject area, though hard work is going into changing the situation. In particular, the head of department has done much to develop schemes and systems, as well as to help colleagues in the department and in the rest of the college. It is a major barrier that the head of department has a very full timetable, so has little opportunity to monitor what is happening around the college, spend time in colleagues’ lessons, supervise drop-in sessions during lesson time, or carry out enough curriculum, systems and materials development at the necessary speed. Even so, there is already particularly good practice in having the pupils assess their situations, in setting targets, and in booking the main computer rooms. Also a start is being made to meet the needs of all pupils across the range of attainment in all classes, rather than teaching to the level of the lowest attainers.

175. In the Sixth Form, the college’s provision for ICT as a specialist subject is satisfactory. However, the college has not yet developed systems for ensuring that all Sixth Formers appropriately develop their “key” skills. Practice is better in the case of the fully vocational subjects, but students on some of the academic courses meet little ICT, and what there is not co-ordinated.

176. The college has made satisfactory progress in developing the teaching of ICT since the last report, though there is still a very long way to go. There are strengths in the examination courses in Year 10 and in the Sixth Form, in the moves towards a scheme of work for Years 7 to 9, and in some aspects of assessment. The quality of teaching in the subject is much improved and a start has been made on training some teachers in other departments. There is an element of good practice in the work of some other departments, though this is yet to be rationalised and co-ordinated. The subjects concerned are design and technology, English, geography, maths, modern languages and music.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths:

- The department is well led and managed.
- Standards of attainment are improving in French and German in Years 7 to 9.
- Standards of attainment are improving in German in Years 10 to 11.

Areas for improvement:

- The amount of teaching lost because of the time pupils take to reach Geneva from the main college.
- The presentation of many pupils’ written work.

177. In 2001, the proportion of pupils attaining a grade in the range A* to C in the full-course GCSE examinations in French and German was significantly below the national average. Nevertheless, these results show an improvement in each language on the results for 2000. The target set for each language in the Action Plan following the previous inspection has been exceeded. The percentage of pupils in the college attaining grades A* to C in at least one foreign language has risen steadily over the last three years. The proportion of pupils attaining grades in the range A* to G was below the national average in French, though in line with it in German. The achievement of boys and girls was significantly lower in foreign languages than in many other subjects.

178. Teachers' assessments of pupils at the end of Year 9 in 2001 suggest that pupils' overall standards of attainment are just below the national average. This is a slight but significant improvement on the previous year. The difference between the performance of boys and girls in college is lower than that found nationally.

179. Since the previous inspection, the department has undergone many changes. The turnover of language specialists has been high; two different teachers have co-ordinated the department in an acting capacity in each of the subsequent years. This situation has now been stabilised, with the appointment of a new head of department in September 2001. Many classes have suffered from lack of continuity, which has had an adverse effect on their attainment and achievement. For example, pupils in one French class in Year 11 have had five different teachers since the beginning of Year 10. Five of the twelve groups have suffered changes of staffing in mid-course, and many pupils have lost confidence and motivation as a result. These factors are reflected in the under-achievement in the examination results for 2001, and are evident in pupils' work and attitudes in Year 11 in French.

180. Pupils' overall standards of attainment in French and German meet national expectations in work seen during the inspection. This confirms the rising trend that is shown in the teachers' assessments for the end of Year 9 in 2001. Pupils' understanding of the foreign language in the classroom is satisfactory. Most pupils have a sound knowledge of appropriate topic vocabulary. Speaking skills have improved since the previous inspection. They are at least satisfactory, and good in many cases. Most pupils can ask as well as answer questions. Year 7 pupils in a French lesson answered a wide range of questions from memory. Higher-attaining pupils in a Year 9 German class spoke reasonably confidently in the past tense, using inversion. They responded well to registration with specific phrases. In conversation with the inspector, a boy in a higher attaining French class talked about the previous weekend, using the perfect tense accurately. In their written work, pupils attain appropriate levels. Higher-attaining pupils in Years 8 and 9 have a sound knowledge of the perfect tense in French and German. Average-attaining pupils in Year 9 can write in French about their daily routines and leisure activities. Average attaining pupils in German have a sound knowledge of means of transport and of the names of different countries. However, few pupils in either language complete corrections in order to improve the accuracy of their written work.

181. In work seen during the inspection, pupils' overall standards of attainment in French and in German are below average at age 16. Many pupils in French in Year 11 have failed to realise their potential because of the lack of continuity of teaching. In German, however, where there have been no staffing problems, standards are improving. At the time of the previous inspection, standards in German were deemed to be well below average. Having finished their coursework, pupils are now preparing for their mock speaking tests. Average to lower attaining Year 11 pupils in a very large French class of 35 pupils performed very basic role-play situations with help from prompts. Lower-attaining pupils in a Year 10 French class talked in short sentences about their daily routine. Higher-attaining pupils in a Year 10 German class are able to say what they have lost and where, and in a Year 11 German

class they can ask each other questions about parents' occupations and what they would like to do later. In their French coursework, higher attaining pupils display good levels of accuracy in using different tenses and a wide range of vocabulary. Higher attaining pupils in German also write with accuracy, showing a good knowledge of word order in subordinate clauses and using inversion well. All pupils use the relevant vocabulary in both languages, but the accuracy of their grammatical constructions varies considerably. One average attaining pupil in a Year 11 French class had produced an interesting short account of the film *Lord of the Rings*, which was explained well in reasonably accurate French.

182. The achievement of most pupils is satisfactory in Years 7 to 11. Higher-attaining pupils are making good progress, for example with the acquisition of the perfect tense in Years 8 and 9 in both languages. Achievement is generally satisfactory for pupils in French in Year 10. Some higher attaining pupils are making good progress in their coursework. Many pupils in Years 10 and 11 are achieving well in German, both in lessons and over time, for example, in the development of speaking skills and the use of the perfect tense. Achievement in French in Year 11 is unsatisfactory for the many pupils who remain disaffected or who have suffered from the lack of continuity in their teaching. Pupils with special educational needs generally make similar progress to the rest of the class. They make good progress when given support in the lesson. However, there are classes in Years 7 to 9 with a significant number of such pupils where no support is available. In one lesson in Year 8 in French, several pupils with special needs would have benefited from a worksheet to help them with their written work, so they could work at the same pace as the rest of the class.

183. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory overall, though they range from very good to unsatisfactory. When they are good or very good, pupils work well and this helps to promote good teaching. Year 10 pupils in a German class responded very well to a registration task. Higher attaining pupils in French and German in Year 9 are well motivated and apply themselves conscientiously to their tasks. Year 7 pupils gave a very good response to a question session that involved using a ball. Pupils generally work well together in pairs. Competitions with noughts and crosses always find approval. Some features, however, are unsatisfactory. Many pupils do not take enough pride in the presentation of their written work; dates are copied incorrectly or not in the foreign language. In a Year 7 lesson, for example, four boys had not brought their exercise books, and teaching time was lost while the teacher had to provide them with paper. In a Year 8 lesson, a small group of boys showed little enthusiasm for work. In another Year 8 lesson, with a high proportion of pupils with special educational needs, the behaviour of a significant minority was unsatisfactory and the pace of the lesson was interrupted. Despite repeated requests to be quiet, the pupils failed to co-operate with the teacher. In a Year 11 lesson, pupils were slow to settle down; the boys showed little motivation to learn. One of the boys had to be reprimanded for eating in class. In another Year 11 French lesson, only one third of the class had produced the previous week's homework.

184. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, though it ranges from good to unsatisfactory. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subject, and make effective use of the foreign language in lessons to develop pupils' understanding. However, teachers do not always encourage pupils to use the foreign language themselves when they need help. Key literacy skills, such as regular testing of important words, the use of the possessive adjective or of past tenses, are developed in many lessons. Teachers' planning is sound: lesson objectives are written on the board in every lesson, so that pupils concentrate on the main objectives. All lessons begin with revision. Occasionally, however, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to speak individually. In the best lessons, teachers use very effective methods, such as flash cards, mime, choral speaking and pair discussion. In a Year 10 lesson, three pupils presented appropriately the visual image of a German sentence to demonstrate the position of the past participle. Teachers' expectations are high,

though they do not always find a ready response from the pupils, because of the poor attitudes of a minority. Class management of pupils is good in most lessons. Homework is set, and the marking of pupils' books is satisfactory. Teachers praise their pupils and make good use of the *Bravo* tickets.

185. The high proportion of unsatisfactory teaching, which was highlighted in the previous report, has been rectified. The teaching staff is now more stable than has been the case for many years. In the only unsatisfactory lesson observed, productivity was low because the lesson had to be interrupted repeatedly to reprimand the behaviour of a small group, mainly boys.

186. Leadership and management of the department are good. The new head of department has only been in post for six months, but has been very effective in introducing new measures to put the department back on course. Her colleagues share her vision for the department and their morale is good. Relationships are also good. Good use is made of assessment data, and National Curriculum Levels are now shared with pupils in Years 7 to 9, who record them in tables in their exercise books. Significant improvements have taken place in the resourcing of textbooks in Years 7 to 9, and to a certain extent in Years 10 to 11: here, however, is where more input is required to ensure that all pupils have equality of opportunity. A French assistant is employed for one day per week to help pupils to improve their oral skills.

187. Accommodation within the department is generally satisfactory, and it is enhanced by good displays. In one room, the lack of curtains impedes the effective use of the overhead projector. However, the main problem lies with the position of the teaching block. The modern languages department is situated in the Geneva building, which is some distance from the main college. The majority of lessons do not begin on time, and sometimes as late as ten or twelve minutes after the stipulated start, so that much valuable teaching time is lost. This impacts adversely on standards. Teachers are unable to make full use of a 50-minute lesson plan with an evaluation at the end. Some lessons have to be rushed and the evaluation is lost. For example, a Year 9 French class of higher attaining pupils only had enough time to complete one paragraph of extended writing, because the lesson had started ten minutes late. If the full time had been available, they would have completed a second paragraph. In another Year 9 French lesson, with higher attaining pupils, the teacher had insufficient time to develop fully the reading component of a written exercise that the pupils had completed in class. In inclement weather, pupils arrive wet and wind-swept, and some of them take a little time to settle down, which results in yet more loss of time. One class in Year 11 of 35 pupils can only be accommodated successfully when some of the pupils are absent.

188. Progress since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. The equilibrium of the department has been restored. An effective and informative development plan has been drawn up for the next two years. Two members of the department have taken over responsibility for the two age groups. Standards of attainment are improving in Years 7 to 9 in both languages, and in German in Years 10 to 11. All pupils follow a GCSE course. Pupils in Year 10 have the opportunity to learn a second language after school. One teacher from the department teaches French in the local primary school for one hour each week on a voluntary basis. After recent training, most teachers are now more confident and competent in using ICT in their teaching. Several classes in Years 7 to 9 produced word-processed work in French and German during the week of the inspection. The high turnover of teachers in past years still continues to be reflected in the lower standards of attainment and achievement in French in Year 11. Nevertheless, the department is committed to high achievement and has the capacity to improve.

MUSIC

Overall, the quality of provision is very good.

Strengths:

- Teaching and learning are mainly good, and pupils achieve well.
- Standards in GCSE work are very good, and good in A Level work.
- Accommodation is good and the department is very well equipped.
- Students show positive attitudes and the behaviour of most is good.
- The range of opportunities, numbers involved, quality of teaching and standards are good in instrumental and vocal tuition.
- The standards reached in extra-curricular work are well above average.
- Leadership and management in music are excellent.
- There has been very good improvement since the last inspection report.

Areas for improvement:

- Students sing insufficiently and irregularly.
- Learning is too keyboard based; students make insufficient use of their own or other instruments in classroom work.
- The time allocation in Years 7 to 9 is too low to allow the National Curriculum to be taught in sufficient depth and this impacts on standards. This point was made in the two previous inspection reports.
- The low number of computers disadvantages students, especially in examination work.
- Instrumental tuition reports are not given to parents, and students do not make use of practice books.

189. GCSE examination results improved steadily between 1997 and 2001, and are well above average when compared with all schools. They are outstandingly good in relation to the number of students achieving A* to C passes when compared with similar schools. Just over 95 per cent of the students gained an A* to C pass last summer. In the Sixth Form, music results have improved over the last two years and are now above average.

190. Pupils enter the college with very variable musical experience related to the quality of their previous musical education, interests and home support. Some pupils enter with above average attainment, but the attainment of most is well below average, as confirmed by teachers' assessments. A few pupils have received very little music teaching in their primary schools. By Year 9, pupils have achieved well in the limited time available, and reach standards that are about average. Some talented pupils attain higher levels than expected for their age. There is the opportunity to join the choir, but pupils have not sung sufficiently or regularly in class to develop an appropriate standard or repertoire. Pupils make very good use of the technology available, for example in developing blues performances on keyboard. Those who receive instrumental tuition attain well above average levels, but the instrumental performing skills and music reading skills of the majority are underdeveloped. Pupils do not have enough experience of instruments other than keyboards or enough opportunity to use their own instruments. Pupils create effective compositions using the technology, and develop skills approaching the expected level. Some have imaginative ideas and are beginning to show understanding of structures and devices. They listen very respectfully to recordings and to each other when performing, but their general musical knowledge is below average, for example of instruments, composers, forms, structures and well known pieces of music. In appraising, they show good understanding but do not use technical vocabulary enough to describe what they can hear.

191. In GCSE work, attainment in Year 10 is above average while that in Year 11 is well above average. Pupils achieve very well because of the intense teaching towards the examination and because of their very positive attitudes. The most talented pupils show good understanding of devices and structures in composing. They create imaginative and original compositions, for example when devising sound tracks to accompany video clips as part of their film music project. They make good use of music technologies (including those at home), but they are disadvantaged by the lack of computers in the department because of the large numbers in the music groups. Pupils listen respectfully to each other and recordings, showing very good musical knowledge and appraisal skills.

192. Overall, teaching is good. A very small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was seen, but teaching was good or very good in two thirds of lessons. This included most of the teaching in examination work and all of the teaching in extra-curricular work, where there was also excellent teaching. Teachers show very secure subject knowledge so that they teach confidently, using their musical skills effectively to interest pupils. Instructions are clear and teaching is energetic, so that the pupils understand the objectives. Schemes and lesson content are thoughtfully put together, but major weaknesses are the lack of regular singing in lessons and the over-reliance on keyboard work. Most lessons are well pitched, with high expectations so that pupils are stretched. In the best lessons, the most musical pupils are challenged by extension work, while additional support is given to pupils who need it, sometimes by support staff, who work well with the class teachers. As a result, pupils with special needs are well integrated and make similar progress to the other pupils. Lessons have clear structures and are very well organised. Discipline is good so that most lessons are orderly and time well used. As a result, relationships are very good and pupils are mainly good humoured and work well, especially in practical work.

193. In examination classes, relationships are excellent. Because of the size of the site, most lessons start late, so that the limited time allocated is reduced even further. However, lessons start briskly and usually maintain a good pace so that pupils work hard, supported by the use of visual aids such as overhead projectors and video. Illustrations and classroom displays could be used more. Excellent use is made of music technologies, including the advanced class keyboard system. The assessment of pupils is very supportive, especially in examination work, and shows them clearly how they can improve. Homework is clearly set to extend pupils' learning. Most enjoy music, especially practical work, and it is a very popular subject. They use equipment sensibly and the department is invaded at breaks, lunchtime and after college by pupils wanting to make music. This includes pupils whose behaviour is normally very challenging in other lessons, who have been successfully turned-on to music. A few pupils do not behave well enough, but most are attentive, make a good effort and sustain their concentration. They are very supportive of each other and work well in groups, for example, in performing or composing, so that the ethos is usually very good. Pupils respond well and enjoy taking responsibility for their learning. The highest attaining pupils are keen to answer questions, and the most enthusiastic involve themselves in the ample opportunities offered by the department and good musical opportunities outside college. These range from the County Youth Orchestra to local bands and church choirs.

194. In GCSE and A Level work, attitudes are positive, and most pupils take advantage of the free instrumental tuition available to them and the excellent opportunities in extra-curricular work. This strengthens their achievement. Attitudes in the Sixth Form are mature; pupils appreciate the provision made for them. They speak very highly of the support and personal attention given by their committed, enthusiastic and hardworking teachers. They also praise the facilities (including the use of the departmental office as their work base) and the richness of the courses, including the wider opportunities available in instrumental tuition and extra-curricular work. In turn, their support strengthens music.

195. Leadership and management in music are excellent. Music is very well organised, and the staff and visiting teachers form a strong team, committed to raising standards. There is very good monitoring and evaluation of the subject's performance, good use of assessment and good strategies to raise standards further. The department is very well equipped, except for ICT. The accommodation is good, except for a temporary classroom in use until the new music studio and additional practice cells are constructed later this year. There are useful links with other schools, but curricular links with the primary schools need strengthening. Since the last inspection, there has been very good improvement: standards in Sixth Form work, teaching at all levels, resourcing, the numbers taking music in examination work, monitoring and assessment and management have all improved.

196. About 200 boys and girls, around 12 per cent of all pupils, receive instrumental or voice lessons from eleven visiting teachers and teachers at the college; this is a well above average number and increasing. Standards are above average and teaching is good; some very good teaching was observed in voice and guitar tuition. The progress and achievement of pupils is good in relation to their ages and the time they have received tuition. However, practice is too variable and pupils do not have practice books nor attend as regularly as they should. The range of extra-curricular activities in music is good, and includes an excellent seventy-strong orchestra, senior wind band, Irish folk band, African drummers, the choir and other ensembles. Standards and the quality of teaching are very good, and individual pupils reach very high standards, as evidenced by their recordings. The visiting teachers give good support to these groups. The college promotes regular concerts involving large numbers of pupils, visits to concerts locally and musicals in London, such as the recent trip to *Les Miserables*. Music groups perform in assemblies but the regular use of music in assemblies is underdeveloped. Groups perform frequently at local primary schools, festivals and local arts and charity events. The department has arranged annual European tours since 1997, and trips to EuroDisney and Kerry in Ireland are planned for later this year. Music makes a valuable contribution to pupils' personal development. The range of musical activity reflects the dedication of staff, the valued support of parents and the college, and the enthusiasm of the keen musicians whose performances and successes here and abroad bring tremendous credit to the college and this very vibrant and improving department. Music is a real strength of the college.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Overall the quality of provision in physical education is good.

Strengths:

- High standards of performance, supported by the extra-curricular activities programme.
- Curriculum planning.
- Links with the community and partner institutions through the work of the College Sports Co-ordinator structure.
- The examination curriculum programme and procedures.

Areas for improvement:

- Monitoring procedures within the department.
- Teaching and assessment strategies, to include pupils' self-assessment.
- Individual education plans.
- Literacy, numeracy and ICT.
- The accommodation.

197. By the end of both key stages, the standards of attainment in physical education are above national expectations. There is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls. In 2001, the number of pupils gaining A* to C grades in GCSE physical education was 79 per cent, which is well above the national average for similar schools.

198. Pupils make good progress as they move through Years 7 to 9. Achievement is good. By age 14, pupils are able to perform well in netball and can explain tactics well. Others know and understand defensive strategies in basketball and can apply these very effectively in a game. In dance, pupils working in small groups can synchronise their movements, showing contrasting levels, pathways and directions and applying the concepts of canon very effectively. In gymnastic activities, pupils demonstrate good levels of skill on the floor, before selecting and applying appropriate movements to be included in a sequence on the apparatus. Social skills are well developed, and pupils work together well in co-operation with a partner or in small group activities. They are able to monitor their pulse rates effectively and demonstrate appropriate warm-up activities, sustaining good activity levels during their exercise programmes.

199. By age 16, pupils have made good progress and achieved well. In netball, in particular, pupils are able to build on their achievements at Key Stage 3. They improve their skills through practice and develop them further by applying them in games. Their knowledge of the rules and tactics of the game are good. They know when to pass and how they can lose a marker in different situations. Pupils know about the factors that affect fitness and can identify the muscle groups involved during a warm-up.

200. In all year groups, pupils make good progress in lessons and also have the opportunity to develop their skills through a wide variety of extra-curricular activities. In a small proportion of lessons, lower attaining pupils do not make the kind of progress of which they are capable, because of the lack of challenge or limited range of strategies to meet their needs. For them, progress is satisfactory, except when modified activities, support and different grouping strategies are provided, and then these pupils make good progress.

201. Pupils always respond enthusiastically throughout a wide variety of activities. They listen and co-operate effectively. They support each other, with a number of instances where spontaneous applause followed a pupil demonstration. During games, they show consideration for each other, abide by the rules of the game and accept decisions very well. In gymnastics, they are able to provide constructive criticism, whilst being sympathetic to the feelings of others. However, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own work or the work of others. Pupils sustain their concentration well, and when provided with the opportunity, they work independently very effectively, particularly during extra-curricular activities.

202. Teaching in physical education is good overall, with a high proportion of very good teaching. Of the many lessons observed, two were satisfactory and all others were good or very good. All lessons have an orderly start and good warm-up activities. Teachers have good subject knowledge. Their planning clearly identifies the learning objectives for each lesson and the stages of progression. The learning objectives are reinforced through effective questioning, which develops good knowledge and understanding in most lessons. However, demonstrations are not always used to reinforce learning. In some isolated lessons, pupils are not always provided with the opportunity to develop their understanding of the activities being taught, because of the limited range of teaching strategies used. Appropriate amounts of time are provided for pupils to consolidate their learning and to improve their level of skill. Lessons have good pace and teachers generally have high expectations of pupils' performance.

203. Pupils are not aware of their own level of attainment and do not assess themselves in relation to National Curriculum expectations. To help them to understand their own development, specific assessment procedures designed to identify relevant criteria need to be built into curriculum planning. Since the last inspection, the number of non-participants has been reduced, but they are not always effectively involved in the lesson. In a small proportion of lessons seen, the behaviour of a small minority of boys disrupted the learning of others on occasions. Good attention is paid to safety issues, although more formal procedures for risk management need to be put in place. Teachers demonstrate a very sympathetic approach towards the pupils and their needs. They provide good support whenever necessary. Relationships between teachers and pupils are always very good, and this is complemented by the opportunities that are provided through a very good extra-curricular activity programme.

204. Leadership is very good, with a strong team of teachers in the department. The head of department manages the work of the department very well, in particular, establishing high standards of performance in dance, games and gymnastic activities, as well as a very good programme of extra-curricular activities. Links with the community and partner institutions further support this programme. The links that have been established with local clubs help to provide clear pathways and opportunities for out-of-college activities. Departmental policies, guidelines and schemes of work are well established. They show clear progression, providing good guidance for the work of the department, though more specific links are needed between the schemes of work and National Curriculum requirements. Observation of teaching by members of the department is done in an informal way and good practice is shared. However, there is a need for more formal monitoring of the work of the department to ensure higher standards of teaching and assessment. The department should also identify in its planning where there are opportunities to promote basic skills, such as those of literacy, numeracy and ICT.

205. There are adequate resources, although a greater variety would benefit pupils with special needs. The existing accommodation, including the changing rooms, is poor and inadequate to meet the needs of a department in a college of this size. The new accommodation that is planned will still be inadequate in size. This problem is made worse during examination periods when facilities are not available.

206. The quality of physical education has improved since the last inspection. A very effective examination course has been introduced over the past two years, and the variety of teaching strategies used within these lessons has led to good learning. The number of non-participants has been reduced, and they are now more effectively involved in the lessons. Particular areas for development are the involvement of pupils in their own assessment and the monitoring of the policies, procedures and practices of the department.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths:

- Teaching is good.
- Accreditation is possible for all pupils in Year 11.
- Provision for personal development in religious education lessons, especially the spiritual, moral and cultural aspects.

Areas for improvement:

- Standards in Years 10 and 11 and the attitudes, particularly of boys.
- Assessment in the first three years.
- Pupils' Information technology skills in religious education.

207. By age 14, most pupils reach standards that are in line with national expectations and the requirements of the Devon locally Agreed Syllabus, although their attainment in literacy is below national levels on entry to the college, and their experience of religious education is varied. Pupils acquire a sound basis of knowledge and understanding of six world religions. They are also beginning to understand how beliefs affect the ways in which people live, and they can relate what they learn to their own life experiences. Their skills in sustaining explanations, either in writing or through speaking, are less secure. They acquire appropriate terminology as a result of the drive to teach literacy skills and can use many of the key words that are part of the technical vocabulary of the subject accurately and effectively in their written work and in discussion.

208. Most pupils make sound progress across the first three years, and current standards at the end of Year 9 represent satisfactory achievement. The shortage of time allocated to the subject affects the breadth of their learning, but short-term learning in lessons is good because teachers are effective and very conscious of using time well. The achievement of pupils with special needs is also satisfactory. The department has improved the ways in which tasks can be moderated for differing abilities so that the needs of all pupils are met in the mixed ability teaching groups. Currently, pupils do not have the opportunity to develop ICT skills in religious education lessons in these years, but this is a priority for the future. There is some development of ICT skills for research and presentation purposes by pupils who use ICT for homework. The behaviour and attitudes of most pupils are satisfactory in the first three years. Generally, they show interest in their lessons and take care to present their work well. Nevertheless, a significant minority in the first three years are not interested and make little effort.

209. The short course GCSE examination results in 2001 were below the national average for the proportion gaining grades A* to C. The difference between boys' and girls' attainment is significant, with 26 per cent more girls than boys attaining results in the range A* to C. In 2000, when far fewer candidates were entered, the results were above national levels. It is not possible to compare or to discern trends, because entry policy has varied considerably. Pupils are learning that there are social and moral perspectives to religious education. They are able to distinguish moral evil, for which human decisions are responsible, from natural evil. Orally, pupils do well in these years and understanding is good. The short-term learning in lessons is good because teachers are effective. Most pupils have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of the stories and teachings of the New Testament. They know the principal festivals of the Christian religion and their significance and meaning. Their knowledge and understanding of the significant details of

other religions is unsatisfactory. They have a basic knowledge of some aspects, but not a deeper understanding. A full course GCSE examination is offered as a twilight enrichment course. Attainment is above average and the pupils who follow it achieve well. Last year, three girls entered and gained high grades.

210. Overall, the achievement of older pupils is currently unsatisfactory. This is due to a lack of time for the accredited course, to poor attitudes towards religious education among boys in particular, and to literacy skills not being good enough. In several of the lessons seen with older pupils, their response was unsatisfactory and it is unsatisfactory overall. Clearly, there is an underlying problem of poor attitude. There were high levels of rudeness and disruption in several lessons, though many pupils respond well. Poor response is not closely related to the quality of teaching. It is related to the college ethos and to low esteem for religious education.

211. The department has been working hard to improve pupils' motivation for the subject, and for many pupils the opportunity for their core studies in religious education to be accredited has provided good motivation for success. Also, groups in Years 10 and 11 have been divided into broad ability bands, which allows teaching to be more closely matched to pupils' abilities. However, there are still a few who do not want to learn. The course chosen is relevant to pupils' needs, with strong provision for ethical work and consideration of some of the ultimate questions of life, such as evil and suffering.

212. There was no teaching of religious education in the Sixth Form, which means that the college continues to be in breach of its statutory duty. However there are twilight classes for AS Level theology, with one student currently, and occasionally there are speakers in assemblies who give presentations relevant to religious education.

213. The time allocated to religious studies is briefer than that required by the Devon Syllabus right across the main college. Accumulatively, this has an adverse effect on attainment, especially as pupils arrive with low standards. Having a third less time than is usual is a disadvantage in particular to the accredited course, although the time now given is more than was allocated at the time of the last inspection.

214. Teaching is generally good across the college, with some that is very good. Where teaching is relatively weaker, the management of pupils is a little fragile in the face of some very challenging pupils. In all lessons, planning is well balanced between the two attainment targets: learning about religion and learning from religion. This helps pupils to relate their learning to their own life experiences and to be reflective, as well as to acquire knowledge. Also, in the better lessons, planning provides sufficient pace and variety of activity to sustain interest. Role-play, artefacts and video material are used to good effect. Teachers praise generously to encourage pupils to think deeply and to recall what they have learnt. Teachers' expertise is good.

215. The schemes of work are of very good quality, but they now need revising to reflect the recent revision of the locally Agreed Syllabus. One important change is the local adoption of the national advisory assessment system, with levels of attainment comparable to those of the National Curriculum. Assessment against these levels of attainment is being implemented. This will enhance the curriculum and the teaching for Years 7 to 9, by enabling teachers to mark and assess effectively and so enabling pupils to be clear about where they are and how they can improve.

216. Much hard work has gone into the programme of study for Years 10 and 11. It is a Christian course, with Judaism for the few who opt for the full course in extra sessions. Pupils are given a thorough grounding in world faiths in earlier years. In the short time available, teachers are able to emphasise the ethical and spiritual aspects and give the pupils opportunities to consider their own views.

217. The subject makes good and often very good contributions to the personal development of pupils in the main college, particularly the spiritual, moral and cultural aspects of development.

218. The leadership and management of the department are good overall, with many strengths. Not least of these is the dedication and hard work that is clearly apparent and the willingness to be very generous with time in order to increase pupils' opportunities in gaining examination success. There is a good vision for future development in line with the college's priorities for raising standards. The accommodation is satisfactory, except that the part-time teacher does not have a base room near the other religious education teachers. The level of resources is poor for a core subject. Teachers try to compensate by photocopying and devising their own materials, but the pupils need more books and the library is too far away from the department to be used during lessons.

219. There have been significant improvements to the quality of teaching and to the monitoring of standards within the department. The main areas for development are to put in place assessment schemes for Years 7 to 9, a religious education course in the Sixth Form, to improve standards and attitudes to religious education among older pupils, and increase the impact of ICT in lessons.

BUSINESS

220. GCSE results have varied over time, but have been well below the national average for the grades A* to C and below for A* to G. The worst results were attained in 2001.

221. However, the standards of work seen in business studies during the week of the inspection were average. These standards are achieved because the teaching is good. Students' knowledge of business and economics causes the quality of their learning to be good. Most students can discuss the functions of price mechanism as a system for allocating resources, types of economy, structure and efficiency. As a result, students' attainments overall, in relation to their standards when they began the course, are at least in line with expectations. There is good achievement.

222. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are average. Students show an interest in business and have a positive attitude to the subject. In Year 11, there are a few poorly behaved students who lack the will to work hard. Most listen attentively to teachers and to each other. They answer questions willingly using the vocabulary of economics. The majority of students present their written work neatly with graphics. Students concentrate hard on business statistics and manage the statistics even when the work is demanding. They show initiative, can plan and organise their work without direct supervision.

223. Teaching is good overall. The teachers work hard to explain business theory clearly so that all pupils, of all abilities, can learn and understand. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The use of ICT is underdeveloped.

DRAMA

224. Drama is a successful subject in this college. Pupils of all abilities are helped to think for themselves and learn to work independently. Standards are improving, and results in GCSE examinations in 2001 were above national average. In the work seen during the inspection, attainment overall was above average at ages 14 and 16. In a number of GCSE lessons, pupils were seen working at even higher levels.

225. By the age of 14, pupils respond well to group work and their speaking and listening skills are well developed. They understand characterisation, gesture and mannerisms. They are willing to explore different techniques, and this develops their understanding of atmosphere, tension and the effective use of body language. By the age of 16, most are confident learners and can discuss the use of a variety of dramatic conventions. Work seen showed depth of understanding of a text and the technical aspects of the subject. In a Year 11 lesson, pupils made very effective use of masks for a specific aspect of the controlled test.

226. Good progress and achievement is due to good teaching in a well-run department. The teaching seen was good overall, and some lessons were very good or excellent. Teachers have high expectations and use effective ways to give pupils ownership of their work. They challenge and inspire pupils, expecting most of them to deepen their knowledge and understanding. Their varied methods enable all pupils to learn effectively. Very good use is made of assessment, and pupils' ongoing progress booklets develop into a helpful critique, particularly by the end of Year 11.

227. Pupils' behaviour is usually good. They are interested, keen to do well and work effectively as individuals and in groups. This was particularly so in Year 7, where pupils were exploring the issues of visual comedy in preparation for a performance for parents. In another Year 7 lesson, with emphasis on movement to music, the energy of the teacher was matched by the keenness of the pupils to put on a good show.

228. The head of department has a clear vision of the way drama should be taught, and this is shared by all staff in the department. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities that allow for full use of the purpose built facilities. The college needs to ensure that the valuable contribution drama makes to the inspiration and to the personal, social, moral and cultural development of all pupils is not eroded by the use of these facilities for a variety of other purposes. There are numerous occasions when the theatre is unavailable for drama teaching because of other demands.

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

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

230. The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001.

GCE A Level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	per cent gaining grades A-E		per cent gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		College	England	College	England	College	England
Mathematics	14	86	87	43	43	5.71	5.80
Physics	10	70	88	30	40	4.20	5.67
Chemistry	6	100	90	17	43	5.67	5.90
Biology	29	86	88	21	34	4.07	5.25
Business GNVQ	5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	10.80	10.45
Computer studies GNVQ	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	9.97
Art and design	10	100	96	60	46	6.60	6.57
Drama	9	100	99	56	38	7.33	6.59
Geography	6	100	92	67	38	8.00	5.74
History	12		89		34		5.43
Sociology	5	80	86	0	37	4.00	5.32
English literature	22	95	95	27	37	5.27	5.91
English language	12	100	91	33	30	6.17	5.27
French	4	75	89	0	59	3.00	5.59
Economics	6	67	89	0	36	2.00	5.52
Design and technology	2	50	91	0	30	2.00	5.38
Music	4	100	93	50	35	7.00	5.74
Social studies	2	50	87	0	34	1.00	5.30

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	per cent gaining qualification		per cent gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		College	England	College	England	College	England
Health and social care	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	9.00	10.79

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

MATHEMATICS

231. Overall, the quality of provision is satisfactory.

Strengths:

- Teaching is good.
- Students enjoy mathematics and have very positive attitudes to their work and the teaching.
- Almost all students who begin on the courses complete them.

Areas for improvement:

- The schemes of work for A and AS Level lack detail.
- Assessment of the students' work is not used sufficiently to improve their progress.
- Some students are not producing sufficient volumes of work to ensure higher grades.

232. The college offers courses in mathematics leading to examinations at AS and A Levels. The students taking mathematics study a combination of pure mathematics, applied mathematics and statistics. There is a re-sit GCSE course for those studying A Level in other subjects who did not achieve a grade C in mathematics at the age of 16.

233. Lessons in pure mathematics, statistics and mechanics were observed for Years 12 and 13. Examples of pupils' work from most courses were scrutinised. Discussions with students provided further information about their understanding of their work and enabled a sounding of their views of the courses and the teaching they were receiving.

234. Results in mathematics at GCE A Level over recent years have been close to the national average. This is in spite of the fact that the department has been adversely affected by staffing problems. Key members of staff have been on long-term absence through illness and, more recently, the college has not been able to recruit teachers with the necessary qualifications and knowledge to the mathematics team. Currently the department is short of almost two full time teachers. This has a direct impact on the teaching in lower years, but it also affects provision for the Sixth Form. The head of department, in particular, has to spend a considerable amount of time organising and supporting the work of temporary teachers who are not trained to teach mathematics. Inevitably this has an effect on her workload. The policy of admitting pupils to study Advanced mathematics courses in the Sixth Form who have studied the intermediate rather than the higher-level paper for GCSE has also led to weaker results. This policy is now under review.

235. The AS Level results for 2001 were very poor. A third of these students have returned in Year 13 and retaken the papers in which they were unsuccessful. They discussed freely the effect on their learning of the discontinuity of teaching due to staff illness, and a provision of teaching time that was too short. The lesson allocation has been increased this year and the new head of department has re-arranged teaching schedules to protect Sixth Form teaching better, so that their work now promises to meet average AS and A Level standards. Two thirds of last year's lower sixth, however, did not gain a qualification in mathematics at this level. A successful feature of the department's work is that students, once they have embarked upon a course, rarely drop out. With the exception of the poor AS Level results last year, most students are successful in their examinations and achieve appropriate results in relation to their prior knowledge and ability.

236. The standard of work seen in lessons and in the students' folders reflects that suggested by recent A Level examination results. Work currently in progress is at a level appropriate to achieving a middle grade at Advanced level. The students cope readily with questions involving momentum and the effect of friction on a particle moving up or down an inclined plane in mechanics. Work in statistics shows confidence in dealing with correlation and regression, although some students had forgotten the first principles for evaluating variance. In pure mathematics, they handle the basic calculus with confidence, although they have had to work hard to understand differentiation, the integration of logarithmic and exponential functions, and the use of partial fractions.

237. Students in Year 12 were seen coming to terms effectively with the solution of equations using logarithms and exponentials. Evidence in their folders showed that most were confident in handling surds and manipulating algebraic expressions. Almost all of the 17 studying for AS Level are in line for a pass grade or better. None, however, is likely to achieve high grades unless they pay closer attention to the areas of work they find difficult. They ask the teachers for help when they are in difficulty and this is always freely given. The teachers, as the students freely admit, are always supportive and on hand to assist. However, too little attention is being paid to the detail of why misunderstandings are occurring. Corrections and reworking of wrong examples are not sufficiently common in the students' work. The volume of work is inadequate in too many cases. Teachers do not use their assessments of the work to make students sufficiently aware of what is needed to improve from one grade to another. This is not to suggest that students are underachieving. Students across the range of ability produce work commensurate with their prior attainment in GCSE examinations. They say that they feel challenged by the work and many enjoy that challenge.

238. GCSE re-sit students find their work difficult and some lack confidence. They work hard, however, and are making good progress, benefiting from a very experienced teacher who encourages and challenges them to do their best.

239. Teaching overall is satisfactory, and some lessons are well taught. The teachers know their subject well and explain carefully, rigorously and effectively. Examples of very good, interesting and challenging work exist, though not frequently enough. One such example was exemplified in learning about sequences. The pupils were given a series of problems to solve in groups of three and four. They were asked to find solutions and develop links between their answers and different types of mathematical sequences. They then prepared and gave a presentation of these to their classmates. They enjoyed this work and it made them think. The learning was therefore very effective. By contrast, opportunities to make the work more interesting were missed in some lessons seen.

240. Since joining the college at the start of the year, the new head of department has had considerable challenges to confront, not least that of managing difficult staffing issues. She is a good teacher, hard working and fully committed to the pupils' and students' success. She has gained the trust and respect of her colleagues. Students in her Sixth Form classes enjoy her lessons, because she injects a degree of humour into them. Inevitably, the first priority for her and the department has been to reorganise mathematics teaching in the main college. The schemes of work and lessons for the Sixth Form are also in need of close review and reworking to bring more freshness and challenge into students' day-to-day work. She has the will and the capacity to do this. She is supported by a cohesive team of teachers, many of whom are new to the college and, in some cases, to the profession. Currently, therefore, departmental management at Sixth Form Level is satisfactory, showing the promise of much better things to come.

SCIENCES

241. Biology and physics were the focus of inspection, though chemistry was also sampled. In chemistry, overall standards have been close to national averages for the last two years. All the students entered for A Level examinations gained at least grade E, though the percentages of students gaining the highest grades (A and B) were below average. Teaching was very good in the one lesson of chemistry observed. Students learned how to relate experimental data to theoretical models of chemical structure. This enabled them to develop good understanding of the ways in which chemical bonding can affect physical properties.

BIOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision is good.

Strengths:

- Levels of achievement.
- Teaching is very good. Lessons are very well structured and promote high academic standards.
- The work of students is very well supported, so they learn very effectively.
- Students have a very good attitude to their work. They are enthusiastic and work hard to meet the high expectations set by teachers.
- Work in the subject is well co-ordinated, and developments are managed effectively.

Areas For Improvement:

- Procedures for assessing the on-going progress made by students need to be more structured.
- The monitoring of teaching is too informal and not thorough enough.

242. Attainment in biology has varied widely in recent years. Overall standards of attainment in biology at the end of the Sixth Form in 2001 were below the national average and were lower than in 2000. Standards were above the national average in 2000, when they were higher than in 1999. In the GCE A Level examinations in 2001, the percentage of students gaining grades in the A - E range was in line with the national average; in 2000 this percentage was above average. The percentage of students gaining the highest grades (A and B) in 2001 was below the national average, though in 2000 it was above average. The attainment of male students was higher than that of females in 2001, whereas it was lower in 2000. The performance of students in A Level biology was significantly worse than in other subjects in the college in 2001, particularly for female students. In 2000, the performance was better than in other subjects.

243. In work seen during the inspection, the attainment of Year 13 students is above national expectations. This is a result of the very good progress being made by the many higher attaining students taking the subject. Most students have a very good understanding of biological concepts, which they can apply successfully in unfamiliar situations. They were able, for instance, to relate selection processes in different species populations to subsequent genetic variations. Teachers pay particular attention to developing experimental techniques. As a result, students are adept at making very good links between theoretical work and practical observations. This was apparent in some well-designed and executed investigational work. An assessed project on the distribution of limpets on the seashore paid careful attention to the control of variables, and involved good use of biological methods and statistical analysis.

244. Students in Year 12 are making very good progress in AS Level biology. They enjoy the work and appreciate the good support given by their teachers. They have adapted well to the more rigorous demands of the subject. Most students are achieving above the national average. They have a good grasp of biological principles from previous work at GCSE which they apply to more Advanced situations. In a very good lesson on the microstructures of plant tissue types, students were able to associate observations made through the microscope with their previous knowledge of transport systems and produced good observational drawings. Good advice and guidance from the teacher supported this work very well.

245. Students display a very good attitude towards their studies. They are extremely co-operative and work with interest and enthusiasm. They strive to meet their teachers' very high expectations. They listen carefully to advice and act accordingly. Students are not easily distracted; they respond well to the purposeful, but relaxed, atmosphere in lessons. Teaching ensures that all students are fully involved. Male and female students make similar progress. Students with special educational needs are supported effectively.

246. Teaching is always good or very good. Lessons are well structured and the work is planned carefully. There are clear links to course objectives. Teachers have a good knowledge of the subject and promote high academic standards. Students' work is very well supported and they learn very effectively. Teachers place an emphasis upon providing individual support. This was evident during a good Year 13 lesson that involved an investigation of the limiting factors on photosynthesis. The teacher worked with each student to improve practical techniques and to ensure understanding of the processes. As a result, students made good progress and learned to recognise possible errors and how to reduce them.

247. Teachers have a good knowledge of each of their students' abilities. However, the procedures for monitoring and supporting students' progress need to be more structured. At present, there is not a commonly used format for assessing, recording and passing on information about students' work. As a result, lesson planning does not always consider individual needs sufficiently. This is a particular weakness, since each teaching group is shared between two teachers.

248. The work of the three biology teachers is co-ordinated effectively and developments are well managed. More attention needs to be given to evaluating the performance of the subject as a whole. Insufficient use is made of assessment data to evaluate whether students' performance in examinations is as good as might be expected from their previous attainment levels.

249. Overall, there has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. Teaching is now very good and promotes the achievement of very high standards. However, the monitoring of teaching is still ineffective; it is too informal and not thorough

enough. Procedures are required that not only allow teachers to be effectively supported, but also enable the very good practice in the subject to be recognised and shared more. At present, too little use is made of ICT. A lack of computer facilities reduces the opportunities available for collecting and interpreting data and for using computer simulation exercises. The accommodation has been improved and the health and safety issues have been rectified. Inspection evidence indicates that the biology department has good capacity for further improvement.

PHYSICS

Overall, the quality of provision is good.

Strengths:

- Students achieve well in lessons.
- Teaching is good. Lessons are carefully planned and provide for a good level of challenge.
- Students' work is well supported. They make good progress.
- Students have a very good attitude to their work. They are conscientious and are willing to spend time improving their knowledge and understanding.
- Leadership of the subject is good. The work of teachers is effectively co-ordinated.

Areas For Improvement:

- The procedures for assessing students' progress are not fully effective.
- The monitoring of teaching is not systematic enough.

250. Standards of attainment in physics at the end of the Sixth Form in 2001 were below the national average; they had declined in comparison with both 1999 and 2000. Standards were above average in 2000 when they were higher than in 1999. In the GCE A Level examinations in 2001, the percentage of students gaining grades in the A to E range was well below the national average; in 2000 the percentage was well above. The percentage of students gaining the highest grades (A and B) in 2001 was below the national average; in 2000 it was above average. The numbers of female students taking physics in both 2000 and 2001 were extremely low. The performance of students in A Level physics in 2001 was better than in other subjects in the college. This was an improvement on the previous year.

251. Inspection evidence indicates that the standards of work achieved by current Year 13 students are close to national expectations. They are working with real purpose and are well supported by their teachers. Some students have a very good knowledge of physical principles, and apply them effectively in different circumstances. For instance, they are able to use their knowledge of energy/mass changes to explain why unstable atomic nuclei undergo radioactive decay. In a few instances, students have important gaps in their knowledge that hinder their progress. For instance, in a lesson on planetary movement, some students were unable to recall the formula relating to circular motion that was essential for gaining a full appreciation of the effects of gravitational fields.

252. Students in Year 12 are making good progress in AS Level work. While they find some aspects challenging, they are coping well with the demands at this level and feel well supported by their teachers. Most students are achieving above the national average. They have a good grasp of basic physics from GCSE, which they apply in more Advanced situations. In a good lesson on electrical power, students made appropriate use of Ohm's Law to calculate the power distribution in complex circuits. Most students were able to manipulate the mathematical formulae appropriately, although a few lacked confidence in this aspect.

253. Students have very good attitudes towards their work. They are enthusiastic and keen to learn. They work conscientiously and are willing to spend time improving their knowledge and understanding. Teachers work hard to ensure that all students are fully involved. Male and female students make similar progress. Students with special educational needs are supported effectively. Many students have good independent learning skills that they use to good effect when completing homework. A small number of students in Year 13 lack confidence in their ability to cope with the work at this level and tend to be over-reliant on their teachers for guidance.

254. Teaching is usually good and sometimes very good. Work is carefully planned and well organised. Teachers have a good knowledge of the subject and set high expectations. Lessons have an appropriate academic rigour and present a good level of challenge. In a very good Year 12 lesson on the diffraction of light, the teacher made good links with the mathematical treatment of diffraction that students had studied previously. Skilful explanation ensured that students understood why the eye is unable to distinguish between two light sources placed very close together. Teachers generally use a combination of explanation and questioning to develop students' understanding. Occasionally, questioning fails to probe individual students' understanding sufficiently. As a result some students find difficulty keeping up with the more complex aspects of the work.

255. Although teachers have a good knowledge of each individual student's abilities, systems for monitoring and supporting students' progress lack overall effectiveness. Limited procedures exist for assessing, recording and passing on information about students' work. As a result, teachers' planning sometimes gives insufficient attention to students' individual difficulties. This is an issue that needs to be addressed, since each teaching group has two teachers. At present too little use is made of ICT in lessons. A lack of computer facilities reduces the opportunities available for utilising mathematical models of physical processes and interpreting data.

256. Leadership of the subject is good; the work of the three teachers is co-ordinated effectively. Good use is made of individual teachers' strengths and interests to deliver the A Level syllabus. More attention needs to be given to evaluating the performance of the subject as a whole. At present, not enough use is made of assessment data to evaluate how well students' actual examination results match predictions from their previous attainment levels.

257. Satisfactory improvement has been made since the last inspection. The accommodation has been improved and the health and safety problems have been resolved. However, the monitoring of teaching is still not fully effective. Systems are too informal and lack thoroughness. Procedures need to be introduced that not only allow for teachers to be effectively supported, but also enable good practice in the department to be fully recognised and shared. Inspection evidence shows that the physics department has good capacity to continue to improve.

BUSINESS

The focus of the observations was on the Post 16 course. Overall, the provision is satisfactory.

Strengths:

- Quality of teaching and teachers' high expectations.
- Moderation of coursework.
- Use of case studies and internet research.
- Learning and study skills.
- The progress that students make.

Areas for improvement:

- Student participation in lessons.
- Differentiated learning to match the needs of students and the monitoring of targeted students.
- Literacy and Numeracy skills.
- Punctuality/submission of work and the completion of homework assignments.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) provision and learning.

258. Standards of work seen in business studies are average. These standards are achieved because the teaching is good. Students' knowledge of business and economics causes the quality of their learning to be good. Most students can discuss the functions of price mechanism as a system for allocating resources, types of economy, structure and efficiency. As a result students' attainments overall, in relation to their standards when they began the course, are at least in line with expectations. There is good achievement. A majority of students do better than their indicated potential.

259. Attainment in Year 13 is average. Students have a good awareness of business theory and practice in everyday life. The power of advertising is a part of that awareness. Understanding of the influence that fashion has on their spending power is another example of that keen perception. They can recognise that people with different roles are involved in business transactions and are familiar with the different sectors of the UK and European economy. Students know and can talk about the variety of businesses within each sector; for example, the size of a multinational company, such as the Honda Motor Company, whose turnover is greater than many small nations' buying or spending power. The higher attaining students quickly see the value of a case-study approach to business studies as it develops their ability to seek and verify evidence. Most students understand and can see the value of electronic data sources to gather current information. Some students spend two hours or more per week researching up-to-date information on economic trends, searching for growth or decline indices. A majority of students focus on relevant theories and concepts related to the UK's position with regard to Europe. All students can use case studies, stimulus materials, textbooks and well-prepared teacher notes to enhance their writing so that it is factually accurate. Spelling and grammar cause problems for a number of learners. Students are encouraged to organise their time and develop their study skills. However, a few students do not complete their assignments on time and miss homework deadlines. Self-motivation and discipline are only just satisfactory amongst students with average attainment.

260. Standards in Year 12 are average. Students demonstrate sound knowledge and understanding of business enterprise in relation to current business theory and practice. The majority of students, but particularly boys, make effective use of relevant business terminology, concepts and computing methods to select up-to-date data. Good use is made of computers to analyse data using a database and results are presented in graph or chart

form. The higher attaining students appreciate the views of different stakeholders in relation to business and economic trends. These students know the advantages and disadvantages of the separation of ownership from control in modern industry. Students are fully aware of the significance of inflation and recessionary trends. Good debates and arguments were observed on the ownership and control of business, the management of people in business and the several functional areas of marketing, finance and production. Students are gaining an understanding of the moral, ethical, social and cultural issues that govern and sometimes influence modern economic activities, for example, equal pay, unfair dismissal and discrimination on grounds of disability. Case study work is used to develop communication and computing skills. This work is developing knowledge of the different types of business organisation that exist. Students can undertake research both individually and in groups. Coursework assignments encourage key skills development. There is some differentiation in the teaching based on outcomes of student performance, both orally and in written work.

261. Examination results at the end of Year 12 and 13 are satisfactory for vocational courses at both levels. Across the old A Level courses, a below average award rate was achieved in 1999, 2000 and 2001, though these results are based on a very small number of students. A better performance is predicted for 2002. The VCE (Advanced) result, based on one student, is satisfactory. Boys have outperformed girls, but not significantly so. The highest awards have been achieved by a number of students who would have been expected, on prior attainment, to achieve lower grades. Examination results at the end of Year 13 show that students have made satisfactory progress compared with their levels of attainment at the end of Year 11.

262. The quality of teaching is good. The teachers provide a suitable learning environment, present business knowledge clearly, and act as a valuable resource to the students. Teachers give students ideas of areas for investigation but leave them to work as individuals. They give help with the presentation of results, and guide students in their use of electronic sources where appropriate. Learning comes both as a result of investigating business in the classroom and in its real-life environment through visits to local firms and good work experience. Equally important are the economic theory inputs from knowledgeable teachers. Clear, constructive teacher guidance is an important factor in the standards achieved. Students with exceptional ability are able to demonstrate their talents by using their initiative and enterprise in their research work. Much of their writing has depth. Those students with learning difficulties find teachers supportive and their assistance invaluable. However, work is not planned to meet the ability levels of different groups of students within classes, and more effort in this respect. Learning is monitored and teachers meet on a regular basis to discuss teaching strategies and student progress. Changes are made to methods as and when necessary.

263. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The teacher in charge monitors subject policies. A variety of strategies is used to monitor the quality of learning in the classroom. These include informal classroom observation, the sampling of students' work and the moderation of assignments. Teachers are made aware of the frequent developments taking place on a regular basis both after school in the formal setting of a departmental meeting and informally during the day. These arrangements are effective in promoting higher standards. For example, teachers exchange materials and ideas on a regular basis. A management goal is to improve and upgrade the range and quality of resources whenever possible, to enhance students' critical understanding of economics. The provision of extra ICT resources would help to maintain the output of work and improve standards. At present, student access to good materials is satisfactory, and it is developing all the time. Students are exposed to a range of sources and resources that present a

variety of views on economic issues. All teachers contribute to this development to aid students' understanding of the inter-relationship between social, political and economic forces in the development of society. However, the quality of education in business is adversely influenced by the poor accommodation provided in the Geneva building.

264. There has been progress since the last inspection. Students are now more actively encouraged to study outside class time and to utilise a wide range of business and economic resources, including internet access. A great deal of time is spent helping students prepare for examinations. Additional learning experiences are obtained through visits to local firms and research work. Where appropriate, the cross-curricular themes of careers, equal opportunities and citizenship are followed. This is a subject contribution to both inclusiveness and social and moral education. The nature of business studies lends itself to a number of issues related to the above themes and the teachers' delivery takes account of this. However, to raise the quality of work further a greater contribution in class is required from students. Homework needs to be completed and submitted on time and literacy skills enhanced.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The focus was on design and technology (textiles and graphics).

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

The quality of provision in design and technology (textiles and graphics) is satisfactory.

Strengths:

- Working relationships between the teachers, including sharing resources and ideas.
- Working relationships between teachers and their students.
- Teachers' grasp and application of the subject.
- Standards of work with textiles.

Areas for improvement:

- Students' understanding of the fundamentals of design and technology.
- Development of students' key skills, especially in ICT.

265. The inspection considered Bideford College's provision in the two courses on offer: textiles and graphics. A combined group of students takes the resistant materials and the graphics course.

266. The numbers of students entered for, and the standards they reached in, GCE A and AS Level courses in design and technology have varied greatly in recent years. Overall, the groups have been very small and have not done as well as nationally. Now, however, the AS and AL groups in textiles and graphics are significantly larger (the smallest has five members), which allows not only for more efficient teaching but also more effective learning. During the inspection week, these 27 students were assessed for gains in skills, knowledge and understanding, by observing lessons, looking at their work, and talking with them. This showed that their attainment is average overall and sometimes better in almost all contexts, in comparison with groups nationally. Their design and technology related practical skills are satisfactory and often good, especially in textiles. The students do not always, however, show an ability to work quickly while sustaining high quality. Also their writing is generally below standard in style, spelling, punctuation and grammar. There is much less use of computers to help develop their portfolios than is normal or expected.

267. That lesson, and discussion with most of the other students, showed a widespread weakness in understanding how designers and technologists work. While all know the words for the main stages of the product development cycle, not all know what the words actually mean. Many are unclear about how to match research techniques to needs' assessment in a given case. Few fully appreciate the significance of the fact that different segments of the market have different needs, wants and backgrounds. For instance, one student is designing a model of a skateboard shop, but is unclear whether to target the design at the client for the model or the customers for the shop. A second is designing a dance dress for eighteen-year old girls, but does not have much experience of dance or the taste in dresses of 18 year olds.

268. Although Post 16 design and technology classes of significant size are very new, the quality of teaching is good. The two teachers involved have a good grasp of the subject, including its fundamental philosophy and approach, and the relevant sets of skills. They make good use of computers themselves. They plan their lessons well, call on a variety of resources, and have a good knowledge of how well each student is doing. Moreover, they work well together, sharing resources, problems and ideas. Unfortunately, it is far less easy for the 27 students to work together. There is no "centre" to the faculty where they can congregate, use computers and share ideas, and there is quite a distance between the graphics and textiles rooms they use.

269. There has been good progress since the last inspection, in that the subject now attracts significantly more students. They learn at a satisfactory rate overall. The teachers have started to focus on raising achievement and standards, which were satisfactory at the last inspection and in some ways they are now good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

270. There was not a specific focus on ICT during the inspection, but lessons were observed in which Sixth Form students were using ICT skills as part of their work in other subjects. The teaching of ICT was satisfactory in all these lessons. In the Sixth Form in recent years, the school has entered fairly small numbers of students into a variety of vocational courses; the numbers of passes have generally been rather better than nationally. Now the school has settled into the Advanced vocational qualifications with groups of at least adequate size. Observation of lessons, study of the students' work and talking with them shows that, in Year 12, their skills, knowledge and understanding are still below the levels required for their courses. However, by Year 13, their levels of attainment are satisfactory and, in some contexts, good. Thus, Year 12 students are still generally slow and inaccurate in word processing and do not know much of ICT in the outside world. Students in Year 13 have satisfactory knowledge and understanding and have, for example, undertaken good research and development towards their own effective web sites.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus was on physical education.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision is very good.

Strengths:

- The examination course.
- Standards of work.
- Relationships between teachers and students.
- Opportunities for voluntary work in the community.

Areas for improvement:

- Target setting and monitoring progress.
- Opportunities for an increased range of teaching strategies.

271. Students have not yet participated in national examinations in the Sixth Form, because this is a new course added within the last year. In their physical education course, students participate in a range of activities and are working at a level above national expectations. Standards in students' work seen during the inspection indicate that their results will reflect the high standards achieved in the previous set of GCSE results. Attainment is above average. During practical activities, students are working at a very good level of performance in football and squash. They also compete in extra-curricular activities in a range of activities and perform at a very good standard. In anatomy lessons, they show good understanding of the flow of the blood through the heart and the nature of blood pressure. They think clearly and in depth about their answers, showing very clear gains in knowledge and understanding during their theory lessons, particularly when considering psychological factors. They answer questions well, often volunteering extended answers. All students make good progress and apply skills very well in different contexts. They develop very good knowledge, skills and understanding during paired coaching activities in squash games. In psychological studies in physical education, students can identify external and intrinsic factors influencing motivation.

272. Teaching in physical education is very good overall. Good use is made of previous learning gained during Years 10 and 11. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, relating the work they cover well into the practical context. This was particularly the case when the effects of exercise were considered in relation to the circulatory system. All teachers have very good relationships with their students. Their planning is good and lessons are taught at a very good pace. Handouts and worksheets are of a very good standard. In some isolated instances, there were missed opportunities to extend pupils' understanding through paired or group discussions.

273. In all lessons seen, behaviour is very good. Students apply themselves well, showing good levels of concentration. During practical activities, they demonstrate very good sporting attitudes and very good relationships with their teachers. In games, they cope with success and failure very well and co-operate well with others.

274. Good resources are available for the examination courses, although the planning needs to be revised to include key skills. Further work is needed on assessment procedures, the recording of assessment information and the setting of targets aimed at raising standards. The current use of the art room and the future planned access to the computer suite appear to be good locations for theoretical lessons if a designated physical

education classroom cannot be provided. Good use is made of local leisure facilities to enhance the curriculum provision. There are already very good community links established throughout the school, and these will provide students with opportunities for Community Sports Leader Awards (CSLA) as well as Millennium Volunteer awards.

275. Since the last inspection, the examination course has been added and now provides pupils with a very good opportunity for further specialist study. It uses the varied expertise of the teachers well and is a strength of the department.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

276. There was a focus during the inspection focus on art and on drama. Music lessons were sampled.

277. In the Sixth Form, music results have improved over the two years since the introduction of music into the Sixth Form curriculum, and are now above average. This is evident in the 2001 GCE AS examination, where seven students obtained above average results, and in GCE A Level, where four students achieved well.

278. Seven students are studying AS Level music in Year 12 and four students are taking the A2 course. Standards are above average and students are achieving well, especially in practical work where they are working at grades 7 and 8, as seen in performances preparing for a recital. Compositions show a secure understanding of harmony, full awareness of style, and competent use of music technologies to create imaginative pieces, such as a set of variations based on a mathematical magic numbers square. Students show good general knowledge and understanding of the history of music, with one student showing outstanding knowledge. The quality of their learning is very good, and they achieve well because their work is supported by their enthusiasm, the facilities available, their mature attitudes and their involvement in extra-curricular work. Students are being well prepared to further their musical careers and/or interests.

279. Attitudes in the Sixth Form are mature and students appreciate the provision made for them. They speak very highly of the support and personal attention given by their committed, enthusiastic and hardworking teachers; of the facilities (including the use of the departmental office as their workbase); of the richness of the courses, including the wider opportunities available in instrumental tuition and extra-curricular work. In turn, their support strengthens music. Teaching in the many lessons seen was never less than good and more often very good, and is very good overall.

ART

The quality of provision for art is very good.

Strengths:

- The very good and occasionally excellent teaching.
- The excellent achievements of the more talented students, and the intellectual and creative effort that all students put into their work.
- The strong leadership of a well organised department.
- The high standards expected by teachers.

Areas for improvement:

- The provision and use of computers and subject hardware and software.
- The organisation of Sixth Form studio areas.

280. Standards at the end of Year 12 are below national averages, but students are achieving well and making good progress. Year 13 students achieve well. They make very good progress as they move from AS to A2 Level examinations. Attainment at the end of Year 13 is consistent with national averages, with some very high levels of achievement by the more talented students. Trends over the past three years have fluctuated, but overall have improved in line with national trends. With a new head of department leading a strong teaching team, in an improving department, there is a very good capacity for continued improvement.

281. Discussion reveals that students are very clear about the direction of their research and artwork. They benefit from a well planned curriculum that has a substantial fine art element, delivered by teachers who have a very good knowledge and understanding of their field, and who are able to demonstrate their own art skills in the classroom. Well known artists, such as Gabo, Christo, Klimt, Matisse, Goldsworthy and others are studied in depth, and students build up very good personal studies of their chosen artists. Some also make a personal study of local artists and are able to visit and interview them. This deepens their awareness of the role of the artist in society. Their sketchbooks are works of art themselves, being very individual in content and presentation, and showing clearly the lines of research and development of their work. High standards of annotation and note taking are evident in their sketchbooks. Fibre art is a strength in the Sixth Form, with students making their own fibre surfaces on which to experiment with mixed media, including stitch work, natural forms and a variety of materials. Very good research into artists such as Klimt, Hundertwasser, Miro and Munch effectively underpins their work. Visits to the Eden project and a study of crop circles broadens the base of their research. The range and depth of research is a strength in all areas of artwork. Students are confident in working on a large scale, and some very good constructions based on the sculptures of Gabo are being prepared for the A2 examination. Life drawing is of high quality in Year 13, with students benefiting from weekly additional classes. These classes have enabled students to make rapid progress in their observational and drawing skills. Some individual studies are of a very high standard.

282. Students have an excellent attitude towards their studies, which enables them to sustain their research and use their free time to pursue their artwork. They are mature and confident in talking about their work. They work hard in lessons, putting a great deal of intellectual and creative effort into their work. Their behaviour is consistently very good and they are polite and courteous to visitors.

283. The quality of teaching is very good overall, and occasionally excellent. Teachers have a thorough knowledge and understanding of their specialist areas and plan well for their lessons. They have very high expectations of students' work, and students appreciate and

rise well to those expectations. They are expert in managing the lessons, giving quality time to each student and ensuring that they stay on track with their studies. They offer a rich curriculum that leads students effectively towards the fine art examination at AS and A2 Level, with an option to study fibre art within the fine art course. Standards set for written work are high and teachers are now focusing on grammar and spelling as a contribution to the development of literacy across the college. Course work is developed very effectively through well-sustained research and wide-ranging practical investigations in a variety of media, including mixed media. Critical studies are an important feature of many lessons, and students build up a critical vocabulary that enables them to discuss their own work, and that of significant artists, in a mature and thoughtful way. Teachers create a relaxed, purposeful and creative environment for learning that enables students to exploit their skills and talents to the full. Examples of their work are displayed in a local gallery, which is visited by local primary and secondary schools as well as the general public. The college has received an award in recognition of the excellence of the displayed work.

284. The department has been through a very unstable period that was evident during the previous inspection. The department has made a good improvement since that time, most evident in the teaching and learning and standards overall. The accommodation has been significantly improved. The present deputy head of department worked hard with the teaching team, as acting head before the recent appointment of the current head of department. She initiated many of the curriculum and monitoring reforms that are now securely in place. The teaching team is very well qualified and experienced, working well to improve standards. The head of department is giving a strong lead, with a clear sense of what is needed to raise standards above national expectations. She is reviewing all aspects of the department's work, and her team works well together to provide a rich learning experience for students. The department is ready to receive a suite of networked computers, and plans are in hand to add good quality hardware and appropriate software, so that the department can give full support to the college's provision for ICT

DRAMA

Overall, the quality of provision is very good.

Strengths:

- Improving standards. Students produce accomplished and confident practical work and this shows very good achievement in relation to previous attainment.
- Teaching is very good to excellent. Teachers make effective use of their professional experience and expertise.
- Very good student response, showing enthusiasm, interest and commitment.
- Very good assessment procedures.

Areas For Development:

- Evaluation and monitoring.
- Professional development of staff through the sharing of good practice.
- Accommodation.

STANDARDS AND ACHIEVEMENT

285. Results have been above average in recent years in the GCE A Level examinations. In 2001, the proportions of students who passed A Level and who passed with the higher grades (A or B) were above the national average. Overall, standards in Year 13 are currently above average, and it is also an improving picture. This is as a result of clear objectives and

an emphasis on interpretation of the text and confidence in performance. The department encourages learning and thinking skills, and students are both challenged and enthused by some inspirational teaching. Students are able to demonstrate their understanding of dramatic techniques, with particular emphasis on the skills of characterisation. They are articulate and very confident in their knowledge of the texts and dramatic conventions.

286. Students are encouraged to engage in research to ensure their understanding of a text within its historical and social context. Their confidence as performers is enhanced through evaluations of their own performance and that of others. This is supported by the use of on-going written evaluations that contribute to an understanding of examination technique. Students are able to discuss character and plot development using technical terminology appropriately.

287. Teachers teach with such confidence and enthusiasm that it becomes infectious. Preparation is very good and teaching materials cater for the needs and abilities of all standards. Teachers have very high expectations and all students respond readily to these. Teachers challenge and inspire students, expecting them to deepen their knowledge and understanding, and they provoke contributions from the students by the challenging use of questioning. Students are prepared to take risks, knowing that they are well supported. They work with great enthusiasm in an atmosphere where positive relationships are a key ingredient to success.

288. Teachers use a variety of teaching strategies to ensure that students deepen their knowledge and understanding of dramatic techniques. The students work collaboratively and respond very positively to each other's views and opinions. Teachers use a good range of practical activities and group students effectively to help them learn better from each other. There is good intervention by teachers. They are supportive, but challenge and encourage imagination and intellectual curiosity. Marking is constructive, with a focus on improvement and strategies to progress learning.

289. Leadership is very good. The courses are well managed, with students' progress being effectively monitored. Careful attention is paid to ways in which teaching could be improved. The head of department has excellent knowledge of the subject and aspects of his good practice should be disseminated to colleagues. The high standards achieved are the result of high expectations of staff, matched, in the main, by the students. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities that help to deepen the understanding and experience of the students. The department makes very good use of its theatre facilities, but there is a heavy demand for the use of this space by other areas of college life. This restricts the use of the accommodation for drama and results in a serious challenge to its effectiveness as a very successful subject.

HUMANITIES

290. Detailed inspection was made of all the subjects taught: history, geography and psychology.

GEOGRAPHY

Overall, the quality of provision is good.

Strengths:

- Teaching at AS and A Level is good, and A Level results in 2001 well above average.
- Fieldwork is very good and a department strength.
- The development of the students' numeracy skills is very good.

Areas for improvement:

- Monitoring of progress and strategies to improve the performance of boys.
- Clear targets for students, reviewed regularly.
- The use of ICT in lessons.

291. The subject caters for 20 students on AS and A Level courses. There is one group in each year. An inclusive admissions policy permits students with potential, but some unsatisfactory grades, to take the course. Provision is also made for students who have not studied the subject before taking this into account, students' achievement is very good.

292. Standards by the end of the Sixth Form are well above the national average. Results in 2001 were well above average, with 70 per cent gaining grades A or B. In previous years, results for grades A to B have been below average, but the overall pass rate for grades A to E has been above. Girls' results are consistently better than those of boys, even though the ratio of girls to boys varies each year. The student retention rate on the AS and A Level courses is very good. In the present Year 13, it is 89 per cent.

293. In work seen during the inspection, the attainment of all students is above average. They show evidence of good to very good note-taking skills. They write detailed essays, use and read good photocopied information and have well organised files. There is evidence of the use of ICT for learning and for coursework. The development of the students' numeracy skills is very good. Students make good spider diagrams, use tabulation regularly and annotate maps and diagrams well. Written essays show that attainment varies from satisfactory to very good, and all students demonstrate good to very good oral and numeracy skills. Coursework is very good. A wide variety of data is collected, collated and analysed, with students using a wide variety of graphs, calculations, ICT and geographical skills. The analysis of data and methods, written judgements and conclusions, shows good evidence-linking skills and very good written work.

294. Teaching is good overall. Teachers use good resources, lessons are well planned and the positive interaction between students and teachers ensures that students develop a secure knowledge base. Where teaching is satisfactory, it is because there is too much teacher explanation, even whilst students are working. In good or very good lessons, resource provision is good and there is positive and shared interaction between students and teachers. In one Year 12 lesson, students were learning to calculate the spearman rank correlation coefficient for different variables, while discussing its use and application. Probability was discussed and the limitations of the calculation explained. The practical exercises and ongoing discussion ensured good understanding of both method and use of the procedure. In a Year 12 lesson on the changing nature of village services, the teacher provided interesting data from local villages in 1850. This was compared with students' own local surveys, which had been done for homework. The students were fascinated by the degree of change and by the changing nature of rural employment. They became absorbed by the research and worked very well. All students show good to very good skills

development in oral work, numeracy and ICT. The latter is used for homework assignments and both home and college computers are used. Students work very well with teachers and with each other. There is mutual respect and students consider they are well supported by enthusiastic and knowledgeable teachers.

295. Leadership of the department is good: enthusiastic, knowledgeable and committed to raising standards. The excellent fieldwork provision promotes high standards for both coursework and ongoing studies. Students respect and value the work of the department and consider they are well supported. The provision of new and current resource material is ongoing and very useful to students. More use could be made of ICT for data studies and research in lessons and the monitoring of work in the department is underdeveloped. Since the last inspection, A Level results have improved and the achievement of students is very good.

HISTORY

Overall, the quality of provision is very good.

Strengths:

- The quality of teaching and learning.
- Attitudes and relationships.
- Monitoring and support of students.

Areas for development:

- The variety of teaching and learning styles.
- Students' evaluation of their work.

296. In recent years, the number of students opting for the subject has increased, although their attainment on entry has fallen. In terms of the proportion of students obtaining grades A to B, standards were well above the national average in 1999 and 2000, although last year they were in line. Students do better in history than they do in the combined total of their other subjects, and, in 2001, the average points score per candidate of 6.17 was above the national average of 5.45. Every candidate in the GCE AS and A Level examinations in recent years has obtained a pass grade, except for one student in 2000. Retention rates are good. Attainment is currently above average and achievement is good.

297. Students have well-organised files containing detailed notes. They have a good knowledge and understanding of the work covered, and present coherent and closely argued analyses of issues, such as the extent to which Hitler planned and was responsible for the outbreak of war in 1939. Lengthy and informed discussion of historical questions makes a good contribution to developing their key skills of communication, working with others and improving their personal learning. Interrogation and evaluation of documents is a particular strength. For example, students select and deploy evidence well to support their judgements in deciding the extent to which the exclusion crisis in 17th century England was the consequence of anti-Catholic paranoia.

298. The quality of teaching in the Sixth Form is very good. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subject and have very detailed knowledge. Students learn very well as a result of clear exposition, good resources and many opportunities for independent research, including the use of ICT. Students receive valuable guidance on examination requirements, and benefit from detailed comment on their work, which clearly indicates the potential for further improvement. Teachers are readily available for individual consultation, and the supportive nature of classroom relationships ensures that students can test their understanding with confidence. Students respond positively to the opportunities offered. Attitudes are very

good. They are attentive and co-operative; contribute willingly to lessons and listen carefully to each other's opinions. Good-humoured relations and mutual respect between teachers and pupils lead to a productive atmosphere for learning.

299. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The head of department has a clear view of the department's strengths and weaknesses. Resources are satisfactory. The department has improved well since the last inspection. The quality of teaching and learning has improved, though some areas remain to be tackled. These include the introduction of a greater variety of teaching and learning styles, and opportunities for students' evaluation of their work.

PSYCHOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision is good.

Strengths:

- Teaching of research methods.
- Schemes of work offer clear and appropriate expectations.
- Pastoral and academic support are given high priority.
- Coursework advice and review.
- Positive working relationships between students and staff that allow interactions with students to promote learning.

Areas for improvement:

- Homework as a vehicle for raising achievement.
- The identification of key skills to develop enquiry and investigative skills.
- Use of computers to explore, develop and present information.
- Vocabulary teaching to help spelling and increase familiarity with specialist language.

300. Students are studying GCE A Level psychology, introduced in to the Sixth Form curriculum two years ago. There are no past examination results. Standards of work seen in psychology are above average, and examination results are predicted to be above average for the grades A to B. These standards are achieved because teaching is good. Students' knowledge and understanding, extended by this good teaching, leads to good learning. For example, they know about cognitive psychology, abnormal psychology and individual differences. Students' achievement is good overall, compared with their standards when they began in the Sixth Form. They make satisfactory progress from Year 12 to 13. There is value added in both Years 12 and 13 in relation to standards on entry to the course.

301. Standards in Year 12 are above average. Students gain an understanding of the terms 'obedience' and 'conformity', for example. They understand why Bowlby's studies provoked a public outcry amongst feminists, particularly the ethical issues raised by the published work. Students recognise the pessimistic work of Asche, Crutchfield and Milgram on conformity. The higher attaining students can write well and produce elaborate descriptions of a study or a theory. A few students struggle with technical spelling. The average attaining students taking psychology occasionally run out of ideas, but they are well supported and can eventually think of correct explanations of key approaches to psychology. With regard to neuro-biological issues, they know that their causes are genetic or produced by allergies and chemical imbalances. They argue coherently about the treatments, such as chemotherapy, electroconvulsive therapy and psychosurgery. These issues support the social and moral awareness that psychology brings to students. Male and female students can collect data in two ways: empirically and rationally. Both genders perform equally well in class. Students in Year 12 fully understand that human development is a dynamic process,

which means that it is motivated or driven by certain forces. For example, they understand the work of Holmes and Rahe on the social readjustment rating scale.

302. Standards in Year 13 are above national averages. Students apply a scientific process to learning about human behaviour. They can, for example, argue about the developmental, gender and socio-cultural factors in health. They make observations and produce facts about psychology. Students can construct a theory to account for a set of related facts and can then progress to generating expectations (hypotheses) from the theory. Male and female students are equally competent in the collection of data to test expectations. Students are able to handle contradictory reports. Most can write about cognitive psychology and analyse and evaluate a range of theories and studies in this field. The high attainers communicate their knowledge and understanding of psychology in a clear and effective manner. The female students are better at spelling, punctuating and grammar.

303. The quality of teaching is good. The teachers of psychology show an appropriate interest in the core areas of cognitive, social developmental, individual differences and physiological psychology. Lessons are planned effectively to develop an understanding of psychology as a scientific study of behaviour and experience. There are well-structured units of work on subjects such as abnormality, which covers schizophrenia, autism and phobias. Teachers use good research studies to illustrate their lessons. Students are well advised that psychology differs from commonsense insofar as it seeks to collect objective and verifiable facts about behaviour and constructs empirically-based theories. The teachers are good at helping students to understand the important concepts of psychology. Students increase their understanding of psychology by discussing their research with their teacher and fellow students. For example, they attempted to explain psychological research into how social identity theory can be used to reduce prejudice. The strength of teaching is the informed commentary and thorough analysis of relevant psychological studies and methods. Students are taught that all findings in psychology are open to criticism. Teachers develop a respect for the individuality and integrity of all human beings.

304. Leadership and management are good. The support and environment that are provided enable students to feel confident, valued and well placed to make the most of their opportunities in the Sixth Form. The subject is socially inclusive. The department has clear aims and they are appropriate and guide the teaching effectively. As a result, students are enabled to gain confidence and helped to achieve their fullest potential, regardless of their academic ability. There are good contacts with further and higher education, which benefit the students.

305. Psychology has not been previously inspected. Improvement is constantly happening to aspects of teaching, learning and assessment. Students are provided with a sound basis of factual knowledge of psychology and they are well supported. The quality of their written work is assessed accurately. However, to raise standards, more homework needs to be set by teachers and completed by students. Students need to organise relevant information clearly and coherently, using specialist vocabulary when appropriate.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

306. The subjects of focus were English and French.

ENGLISH

Overall, the quality of provision is good.

Strengths:

- Results in 2001 showed an improvement and were above average in English language.
- Teaching is energetic and effective, employing a range of teaching and learning styles.
- Teachers mark work carefully, with clear indications of how students could improve their performance.
- Students show enjoyment and confidence, and work willingly together to build on their knowledge and understanding.

Areas for development:

- Although written work is marked in detail, there is no systematic provision for students to review and reflect on their achievements over time or to set learning targets with their teachers.
- The number of books in the library to support the teaching of English language is inadequate.

307. Standards in English are satisfactory. GCE A Level examination results in 2001 showed an improvement overall. Results in English literature were very slightly below the national average, while those in English language were above it. During the last three years, literature results have moved steadily closer to national averages, with girls consistently attaining higher grades than boys. Over the same period, language results began slightly below the national average, but significantly exceeded it in 2001.

308. Students' achievement in English is good. Although most begin the GCE A Level course with a GCSE grade C or above, a few are sometimes admitted after performing less well at GCSE. Very few students fail to complete the course or to gain a pass grade, and most achieve well in relation to their GCSE results. In the first year of the Advanced Supplementary examination, students did well in their module tests.

309. In work seen during the inspection, students clearly show a steadily increasing understanding of the demands of the subject. They learn how to balance analysis and response, and become more independent and confident in their learning as a result of well-structured and lively teaching. From the beginning of the course, they are taught to use specialist vocabulary accurately, both in lessons and in written work. Most structure their writing carefully, though a few lower attaining students continue to make some mechanical errors and under-use paragraphs to develop a line of argument. By Year 13, however, they have made good progress and write effectively, conveying enjoyment and understanding. The most able students in Year 13 have an impressive command of subject vocabulary in their coursework. This was used particularly effectively in an extended research project investigating language variation. Language students show an impressive ability to recall the key ideas of major linguists, and they could apply these confidently in a Year 13 lesson on male and female speech features. Girls and boys contribute equally in lessons, and most students are fluent talkers and active and supportive listeners. In a lesson on Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, for example, these well developed oral skills enabled the class to share a great deal of historical background information to prepare them to understand the play in its context.

310. GCE AS and A Level students work enthusiastically in lessons and organise their written work and course materials efficiently. They usually arrive promptly, despite the distances to be covered on a large site, and always have a business-like attitude in lessons. They respond equally positively to whole-class teaching and to group work. The best students look for opportunities to develop their expertise outside lessons: a Year 13 student described enthusiastically her contribution to the National Literacy Strategy work with Year 7, when she taught them about *pidgins* and *creoles*. Several students in both A/S and A Level classes have chosen to study both language and literature.

311. The attitudes of GCSE students in the Sixth Form are more varied. Some are highly motivated and work hard to gain a higher grade in November; others attend erratically and display less commitment and understanding of their responsibilities as learners.

312. Teaching is good overall and some of it is very good. Successful lessons are characterised by a stimulating pace, a good rapport with students but a willingness to challenge them. This was used effectively on several occasions to encourage students to develop and support an initial answer or opinion. Students commented favourably on the contrasting styles and teaching strategies they experience and saw how this contributed to their growing mastery of the subject. Teachers make skilful use of contemporary and familiar examples to help students understand confusing references in texts. In a Year 13 literature lesson, a brief mention of the film *Gladiator*, for example, immediately removed the difficulty students were experiencing with a passage in Macauley's *Horatian Ode*. Teachers know their subject well and convey enthusiasm for it. They are most successful in helping students to share this enthusiasm when they give time for them to arrive at their own understanding of texts, through such active-learning strategies as peer presentations, role play and informal group discussion. The latter was used particularly effectively in a Year 12 poetry lesson taught by an initial teacher training student: the class examined the language of two poems in pairs. With the help of written prompts and this opportunity for informal exploration, students were able to move with ease to a lively and insightful whole-class discussion. Teachers are careful to maintain a balance between stimulating interest and enjoyment in individual lessons and reminding students of the specific demands of each module. In several lessons, teachers made reference to syllabus assessment objectives, and this had been reinforced in one class by asking students to add brief comments on one another's essays to accompany the teacher's response. Although males are a minority in A Level classes in English, they often contribute with enthusiasm and always work effectively in formal and informal situations. The range of teaching styles they experience ensures the full participation of male and female students.

313. The A Level teachers are a strong team and would be further strengthened by arrangements in the department to support collaboration and share expertise. When colleagues are absent, for example, documentation that lists resources and provides a snapshot of the various examination modules would be extremely useful. Regular team meetings and some observation of one another's teaching would build on existing good practice. English is taught in a suite of adjacent rooms, and posters and displays of A Level work help to raise the profile of the subject, both for the students themselves and for younger pupils. Given the distance from the college library, however, students would benefit from access to a computer in their teaching room. English literature students are better served by library provision than those who study language at A Level. The language course is well resourced with photocopied materials, but there is no central storage of these to which staff and students have easy access within the English area.

314. Standards in English at A Level are improving. There is much good teaching and some very positive attitudes among the students. The department should continue to support students to achieve their full potential by putting in place a requirement that students

regularly review and reflect on their progress, set targets and have the opportunity to discuss these with their teachers. This will strengthen the monitoring and target setting that will become possible when individual GCSE performance is used to predict A Level achievement. This is about to become a feature of the college's Sixth Form provision in all subjects.

FRENCH

Overall, the quality of provision in French is satisfactory.

Strengths:

- Students' good attitudes, allied to good teaching, lead to good learning.
- The course makes a good contribution to students' cultural development.

Areas for improvement:

- Opportunities for students to undertake independent research.

315. The number of students entered for the A Level examination has been small and the results over the last few years have varied. In 2001, three of the four candidates achieved grades in the range C to E, which is below the national average. As a result of staff turnover within the department, these pupils were taught by two experienced specialists who had undertaken no recent teaching at this level. Resources were limited, and the curricular time allocated to the subject was less than now.

316. The evidence from work seen in lessons and in students' files shows that standards are rising. Standards are now average overall, and students' achievement is satisfactory. They have acquired a good range of the relevant vocabulary to enable them to understand the wide range of topics that they cover: for example, genetically modified food, cloning or holidays in France. They consolidate grammatical constructions and tenses, adding the past historic to those tenses already known. Students speak with good accents and one of them has lived in France. They write with reasonable accuracy on topics that they have covered.

317. Students' overall levels of attainment in Year 12 are average. Their understanding of the foreign language used in the classroom is good. However, their oral skills vary and pronunciation is not as well developed as in Year 13. Students complete a wide range of exercises to consolidate and extend their knowledge of tenses and grammar. They write with some confidence, employing some of the relevant vocabulary that they have encountered. Their work is well arranged in their folders and is mostly well presented.

318. The quality of teaching is good. Students' good attitudes to the subject, allied to the good teaching, means that the students learn well. Teachers make extensive and effective use of the foreign language in the classroom, and this promotes their students' understanding. They provide good opportunities for students to extend their knowledge by reading texts, to commit the key words or sentences to memory, and to revise them in speaking or in writing. In a Year 13 lesson on immigration in France in the 1970s, for instance, students made good progress in the acquisition of the relevant phrases to describe the state of the population in the years following the war in 1945 and the growth of the economy in the later years, together with the return of the expatriates from Algeria. The teacher showed how words that students knew, such as *moyen*, could be used as an adjective and as a noun. In a Year 12 lesson about the French educational system, the teacher made good use of the worksheet from the listening comprehension to help students

to develop their oral skills, by challenging them to say whether they agreed with the statements or not. The teachers share their enthusiasm for the French language with their students and make the lessons interesting. At present, however, there are inadequate opportunities for students to undertake independent research.

319. Year 13 students expressed their satisfaction with the course. They particularly enjoy learning about the different cultural institutions in France, which, they feel, leads them to a better understand of those in England. They like the small size of the classes, because they receive more attention and more help. Overall, the course makes a good contribution to students' cultural development.