

INSPECTION REPORT

THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE WHITSTABLE

Whitstable

LEA area: Kent

Unique reference number: 118803

Headteacher: Mr Malcolm Ramsey

Reporting inspector: Mr John Beardsmore
16429

Dates of inspection: 22 –26 May 2000

Inspection number: 199127

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Modern (non-selective)
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 17
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Bellevue Road Whitstable Kent
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr John Simmonds
Date of previous inspection:	10 November 1997

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			How well the school cares for its pupils
			Partnership with parents
Brian Emery	Team inspector	Special educational needs	
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Rhona Humphries	Team inspector	Information and communications technology	
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			Teaching
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The Community College Whitstable is a mixed, non-selective, 11 to 17, community school, with 670 students, of whom 11 are in the one-year sixth form. A high proportion of the local school population - around 30 per cent - attend grammar schools. In addition, the college has traditionally lost students from its catchment area to other schools that were perceived by parents as more favoured.

The college roll fell over a number of years but is now rising again steadily. Because of the factors outlined above, the average attainment of students on entry to the college, especially their standards of literacy, has been low well below the national average for all schools, though there is a small minority of students of higher ability, and the college has begun to admit students who were eligible for grammar school places. The proportion of students with special educational needs is high - around 40 per cent, and a significant minority of these have behavioural problems. The proportion entitled to free school meals (24 per cent) is also above average. Only two per cent come from ethnic minorities and only one student has English as an additional language.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The college has made a remarkable recovery in a very short time, with significant improvement in every area of its work. The leadership of the headteacher is exceptionally effective and much of the teaching is now good. Last year's test and examination results remained low but there is clear evidence in the students' present work of rising standards. The small sixth form is uneconomic at its present size but, overall, the college now provides good value for money. It is now an effective school, with no significant weaknesses.

What the school does well

- The headteacher provides excellent leadership
- A high proportion of the teaching is now good
- Provision for students with special educational needs is very good
- Many students are now making good progress
- The relationships between students are good
- Provision for students' welfare, and for their personal development, is good
- Provision for information and communications technology is good.

What could be improved

- Results in National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations
- Standards of attainment in mathematics
- Attendance by a minority of students whose parents condone their absence
- Aspects of teaching in a minority of lessons
- The college's partnership with parents.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

As indicated above, the improvement since the last inspection has been rapid and very substantial. At the time of the last inspection, in November 1997, the (then) Sir William Nottidge School was deemed to have serious weaknesses. Soon afterwards redesignated as a community college under new leadership, its response to the key issues of that inspection was thorough, detailed and very effective. Given the timescale involved and the severity of the school's problems as reported at the last inspection, it is not surprising that test and examination results have not yet reflected the improvement in standards which is now evident in students' work. The actual progress, which the majority are now making, given their starting point, is good, however, as is a substantial majority of the teaching. Improvement is evident in all aspects of the college's work, especially, and importantly, in its provision for students with special educational needs and its literacy programme, from which all students benefit. Absence by a small minority of students remains an intractable problem and the behaviour of a few students is still not good enough. Nevertheless, under its present leadership the college is now in a strong position to secure further improvement.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1997	1998	1999	1999	
GCSE examinations	E*	E	E*	E	well above average A average B above average C average D below average E well below average

Where the results are graded E*, this indicates that they are in the lowest five per cent of schools.

Both the average points score and the proportion achieving five grades A* to C improved slightly in 1998 but fell back sharply in 1999. A significant reason for this was the loss of 25 of the higher attaining students in that particular year group who moved to other schools before taking their GCSE. The 1999 results in most subjects were below, or well below the national average for all schools, except in art and English literature.

The college has set challenging targets for improving examination results, based on a detailed analysis of students' past and present attainment, their scores in verbal reasoning and reading tests and a national test designed to predict GCSE results. Inspection evidence, including a detailed scrutiny of students' work in the present Year 11, indicates that standards are rising and that these targets are realistic. The achievement of most students, based on their earlier attainment, is now satisfactory.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Satisfactory. The majority of students enjoy school and there is a pleasant atmosphere in and around the college. Students are proud of the college and generally have positive attitudes to learning, although in many lessons they are passive learners.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Satisfactory. Behaviour in almost all lessons and at break times is satisfactory and often good and in only a few lessons does the poor behaviour of a minority adversely affect the learning of others. Students generally behave sensibly in lessons and around the college and they are well mannered. The level of exclusions is above national averages but it is below the average for similar schools in the area.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships between students and staff and between students are good but students' self study skills are under-developed and they are compliant rather than active learners.
Attendance	Although attendance is closely monitored and unexplained absences followed up, overall attendance is well below national averages. The attendance of a significant minority of students, particularly in Key Stage 4, is very poor and adversely affects their learning and progress.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	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.

Teaching was satisfactory or better in 95 per cent of the 141 lessons observed during the inspection. It was good or better in 63 per cent, very good in 18 per cent and excellent in a further five per cent. The teaching was unsatisfactory in six lessons observed and poor in one lesson. The quality of teaching has improved markedly since the last inspection, when around 20 per cent was judged to be unsatisfactory and the proportion of good teaching was much lower.

In the three core subjects, teaching was particularly strong in English, where over three-quarters was good or better. It was also strong in science, where this proportion was almost as high. In mathematics, the great majority was satisfactory, with a quarter of lessons being good and one lesson being unsatisfactory.

There was an exceptionally high proportion of excellent and very good teaching in art, whilst in history the teaching was never less than good. In all the other subjects the quality of teaching varied: it was never less than satisfactory overall, though in a few cases with the odd unsatisfactory lesson in contrast with the good or very good.

The skills of literacy are now very effectively taught, and are emphasised in all subject areas across the curriculum. The teaching of number skills is satisfactory but needs to be

better planned and co-ordinated. The needs of students at differing levels are well met in most, but not all classes. Students with special educational needs are well taught, especially where the teachers work closely with the learning support assistants. Students' learning is good in many lessons and satisfactory overall.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good quality, providing satisfactory breadth and balance, and with a satisfactory range of extra-curricular activities. Careers education and work experience are very good. No provision for religious education in the sixth form.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Provision is highly effective. All statutory requirements are met.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good: assemblies are dignified and thoughtful occasions and fully meet statutory requirements. The college has a clear moral code and encourages its students to behave responsibly.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The college has good procedures for monitoring students' academic and personal development and attendance, and very good procedures for monitoring behaviour.
How well the school works in partnership with parents	The college provides good information for parents; learning support and tutorial staff have good links with parents where there are concerns about academic or other difficulties. A significant minority of parents do not support their children's learning by ensuring they attend the college regularly, complete homework and coursework, nor do they attend consultation meetings with staff.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher's leadership is exceptionally effective. Management is good at all levels. The college improvement plan is detailed and thorough and provides a useful tool for further development.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body is well led and informed about the college's strengths and weaknesses. It fulfils its responsibilities well.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good use of data about students' attainment and progress, on which the college bases its ambitious, but realistic targets for

	improvement. Monitoring of teaching is systematic, but needs to focus more closely on how well the students are learning.
The strategic use of resources	Staffing and accommodation are sufficient for the needs of the curriculum. Information technology resources are exceptionally good but there are not enough books for all students to take home a textbook. The budget deficit is being reduced in collaboration with the LEA. Financial planning is good and satisfactory attention is paid to the principles of best value.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are helped to achieve their potential • Quality of academic and pastoral support for students with educational or emotional difficulties • Improvement in the college over the past two years • Fostering of positive attitudes and values • The new and expanding community role • Improvements in buildings and facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount and type of homework, particularly in Key Stage 3 • The poor behaviour of a minority of students • The lack of drama in the curriculum

The inspection confirmed the positive views of parents. So far as the negative views are concerned, although homework set during the inspection was satisfactory, some students' homework books showed gaps during the previous term, which confirms the parents' views. On the other hand, behaviour was good in most lessons and satisfactory overall. A number of the students are challenging in their behaviour and require skilful handling. During the inspection they were well supervised, and their attitudes and behaviour were being closely monitored. Most teachers were consistent and confident in managing students' behaviour in almost all lessons, though a minority do not find this easy. The lack of drama reduces the breadth of the curriculum but the college plans to put this right as soon as finances allow.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

Summary

1. Since the last inspection in November 1997, the results in Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests and in GCSE examinations have been well below the national average for all schools. These standards reflected the serious weaknesses identified in the last inspection and were not high enough. The students concerned did not, on average, reach their potential. Since then the college has made strenuous efforts, in a number of important ways, to raise standards. This inspection has found considerable evidence, in the work that students are currently doing, of rising standards. Students' achievements (that is, their present standards compared with their own starting points and the progress they have made) are now satisfactory in general and, in some cases, good. More remains to be done, but the college now has very effective strategies in place to achieve this.

Standards on entry

2. For reasons explained in the summary, above (Information about the School), students arrive in Year 7 with literacy and numeracy levels which are well below the national average. This is shown in the results of National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Key Stage 2 and other tests taken at the time of students' entry to the college. There is good evidence that students now in Year 7 and 8 have better reading skills although they are still below average. The low standards on entry, especially in reading and writing, have a major impact on standards of work throughout the college. This is why the college literacy programme and the provision for students with special education needs, described below, are so important.

Key Stage 3

3. Standards in the National Curriculum tests in English, mathematics and science have been well below national averages over the last three years. During this time boys' attainment has remained static whilst the performance of girls in mathematics and science has declined to below that of boys. This is in marked contrast to the overall national trend of improvement and the national trend of girls' attainment in relation to that of boys. The 1999 National Curriculum test results when taken together were well below the national average for all maintained schools. Standards seen during the inspection in the work of students in Year 9 have improved in English and science, so that they are now closer to, though still below, the national average for all schools. Standards in mathematics, however, are still well below the national average and are not high enough.

4. In other subjects, the 1999 National Curriculum Key Stage 3 teacher assessments were typically below the national average, but at the average for all schools in art. Broadly speaking, inspection evidence confirms this pattern of attainment in the present Year 9. Exceptions are art, design and technology, information and communication technology and physical education, where present standards are in line with the national average. Across the curriculum the highest attaining students are well above the national average in art, above average in English, design and technology and information technology, and at average levels in other subjects.

5. There is clear evidence in English of the increasing success of the college literacy strategy. Teachers have worked effectively in liaison with primary schools and in the college's summer schools to maintain the improvement seen in recent Key Stage 2 results in English. They are using data from assessments to good effect to set students targets for continued improvement. In many other subjects, for example, in science, the concerted efforts of teachers to address the weakness in students' literacy is supporting the work of the English department well. In mathematics, as a result of more stable staffing and more systematic teaching, the students in Years 7 and 8 are now making satisfactory progress.

Key Stage 4

6. At Key Stage 4 GCSE results have been well below the national average for all maintained schools over the last three years, and in 1999 were very low. In 1999, the proportion gaining grades A* to C in English was well below the national average but that of candidates gaining grades A* to G matched the national average. In mathematics, results were well below at A* to C but also below average at A* to G. In single science, results were well below average at both A* to C and A* to G, but better in double science. In all other subjects, results were below or well below average, except in art and English literature where very good results boosted the overall average rate of A* to C successes.

7. Over the last three years standards did not improve during a time of national improvement, and the degree by which girls underachieved became more apparent. Their attainment has been higher than boys' but the difference is narrower than in the national trend where girls are tending to outperform boys by significant amounts. In 1999 the proportion of candidates gaining five grades A* to C fell significantly from 19 per cent to ten per cent. This was very largely the result of the transfer of 25 higher achieving students from that year group over a period of time to other schools. In fact, the 1999 figures, though poor, do show some improvement over previous years, in that the proportion of the year group attaining five subjects at A* to G and one subject A* to G both rose slightly.

8. During the week of the inspection Year 11 students were absent from the college on study leave. Although no observation of lessons was therefore possible, the college provided a substantial sample of students' work, including work done under examination conditions, for inspectors to scrutinise. This shows that, though still below average overall, standards in written work have risen from those shown in the 1999 GCSE results. In art, information communications technology and physical education standards are at average levels for all schools, in mathematics they are still well below average. In other subjects, standards are below average for all schools but more in line with standards in other secondary modern schools. These standards reflect the improved subject targets for GCSE in 2000. Differences in the standards achieved by girls and boys during the inspection were similar to those shown in public tests and examinations in recent years.

9. Further improvement is evident in Year 10 where, in some subjects, students are starting to catch up with standards attained in Year 11, especially in English, mathematics, history, and religious education. For example, in English, students show an increasing command of the written language, and although their vocabulary remains rather unadventurous, they make good progress in a range of writing tasks, including detailed commentaries on the literature studied for GCSE. In history, standards in coursework and class discussion show students making progress in handling detail, and offering considered views on complex issues such as home rule in Ireland. In religious education, below average students show good progress understanding how design in the natural world can be used to prove the existence of God. There is evidence of continued good progress in information and communications technology.

Sixth form

10. In the sixth form students are reaching course expectations in the General National Vocational Qualification and achieve well in art and design, leisure and tourism, and business studies. All students currently taking the intermediate level business studies have successfully passed each module to date. In art they are above this level and achieve very well. All students achieve well or very well in relation to their prior attainment.

Literacy skills

11. On entry to the college, students' overall competence in literacy is well below average, though less so in the present Year 7. They have a limited range of vocabulary and sentence structures. There is a range of competence in reading: a minority of students reach levels that are in line with expectations for their age, but there is a substantial proportion whose reading ability is well below what is needed to deal adequately with the secondary curriculum. For many, writing presents great difficulties, not only in terms of handwriting, spelling, punctuation and formal usage, but also in fluency - the ease with which they can express their thoughts and information efficiently and at the required length. Although inhibited by lack of skill in earlier years, students make good progress over time in expressing their ideas in the spoken and written word. In a Year 9 religious education lesson, for example, more than half the class took part in a discussion about Christian concepts of hell that included confident references to Dante's *Inferno*. When reading aloud in history lessons, many students are hesitant but correct themselves. The clear emphasis on key words by teachers in many subjects provides them with a wider vocabulary that they use with increasing accuracy in their written work. Limited literacy skills across the curriculum continue to affect their attainment, up to and including their work at GCSE. However the consistent application of the college's literacy policy is leading to a steady improvement in these essential skills. The evidence shows that over the past two years students have made more progress in English at each key stage than in previous years.

Numeracy

12. Students' number skills are well below average. Students are too often reliant on calculators for simple sums, although their number skills are usually adequate for the demands placed on them by other subjects. For example, in geography students in Year 9 can put information about the national wealth of different countries in rank order. In design and technology they carry out research and represent data collected using graphs, for example, bar charts. However, the skills needed for science are sometimes not strong enough. Although students can interpret and draw graphs, a Year 10 class found it difficult to identify angles of plant cell structures. Students need more practice to improve their number skills. There is no whole-college numeracy policy to co-ordinate work in other subject areas and systematically to build on, and improve, their existing skills.

Other skills

13. Some practical skills, too, are undeveloped. In modern languages, for instance, standards are often high in writing but are not high enough in speaking. In music, students are beginning to develop and extend their compositions, using texture and dynamics imaginatively, but success in more conventional composition and in performing is limited because so few students have instrumental experience. In design and technology, students' designing skills are weaker than their making skills.

Achievement

14. Students' achievement overall is satisfactory at both Key Stages 3 and 4, and good in the sixth form. This represents a real improvement since the time of the last inspection, when there was much evidence of underachievement. At Key Stage 3, achievement is good in the majority of subjects, including English, and satisfactory in the rest. At Key Stage 4 achievement is very good in art, it continues to be good in English and religious education, and is satisfactory in all other subjects. A central and consistent factor in raising students' achievement has been the improvement in teachers' planning. As a result, teachers now meet the needs of students of different levels of attainment much more effectively and provide more challenge in their lessons. For example, in art, improving progress and achievement are attributable to the consistently high quality of the teaching, which enables all students of all levels of prior attainment to work confidently at an appropriately high level. In English too, teachers plan in detail for different levels of attainment and provide appropriate tasks. In religious education, teachers' planning is thorough and their expectations are high, both of what students can achieve and of how they should behave. In some subjects, notably mathematics, science and modern languages, greater stability in staffing has been an important factor in the improvement in students' achievement.

15. The highest attaining students achieve well, especially in art and English, and often in geography, history and modern languages. They are well motivated and, when the teachers' expectations are appropriately high and the work is challenging, make good progress. Most subjects are now providing more suitable Programmes of Study for higher attainers, for example, in mathematics, but more still needs to be done to enable all such students to progress as well as they should.

16. Students with special educational needs make good progress at both key stages. They make very good progress in their withdrawal lessons with the learning support

department where teaching is skilled and assessments used very well. Those with statements of special educational need make very good progress in meeting their individual targets. Across the curriculum, students' progress varies but is at least satisfactory. It is good, for example, in design and technology, where there is good and regular support from learning assistants. In some cases, teachers do not make full use of the potential of this valuable resource. Their contribution is most effective where teachers involve them in planning the lessons and in teaching small groups.

17. The one single factor which now holds back achievement for some students is their poor attendance. This has a very adverse effect on their progress, especially in key skills. It prevents them from achieving satisfactory examination results and depresses the college's aggregate GCSE results. Those who do attend are making at least satisfactory, and in many cases good progress.

Measures to raise attainment

18. In the past two years, the college has introduced a series of systematic measures designed to raise attainment. In particular, the assessment of students' performance is now both much more accurate and much better used to set targets for individuals and groups of students, as is described later in this report. Very effective use is now made by senior management of students' National Curriculum test results, ability tests and reading ages. Overall targets for future examination results are challenging but realistic. The college has also successfully worked to raise standards by improving the quality of teaching, in particular, by developing teachers' competence in meeting the needs of differing levels of students' attainment.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

19. Students are proud of their college and there is a pleasant atmosphere in and around the college. The college uniform and the commitment to excellence, explicit in displays, expresses the renewal of a positive ethos throughout the college.

20. The majority of students have a positive attitude to the college, their teachers and to learning. Parents and students confirm that attitudes to learning and behaviour have significantly improved since the last inspection, when there were concerns that the anti-social behaviour of a significant minority of students was having an adverse effect on the attitudes and learning of others. Behaviour is now satisfactory. During this inspection the behaviour in lessons was generally satisfactory, often good, and in only a few lessons was the learning of the class adversely affected by the poor behaviour of individual students. Generally, students moved sensibly between lessons without undue supervision and without too many reminders to tuck their shirts in and take off coats in classrooms; there were only a few instances of over-high spirits and boisterous behaviour at lesson changeover and at the end of the day. At break time, students queuing for food in the dining hall and in the areas around the vending machines took their turns with good-humoured patience, and they made good use of break time for relaxing, catching up with work in the resources centre, chatting to friends as well as for letting off steam playing informal games of football.

21. Students feel safe in the college and there is an absence of bullying and harassment. Teachers are consistent in applying the college rules and codes of conduct.

Students know what is expected of them in terms of behaviour and good manners. Parents and students have noticed the improved behaviour as a result of clear boundaries being set. Although the replies to the parental questionnaire show that a significant minority of parents still have concern over the standards of behaviour in the college, comments at the parents' meeting and added to the questionnaire confirm that they feel the college deals effectively with poor behaviour. They feel that there has been a marked improvement in behaviour since the last inspection, and that the occasional pockets of disruption are well contained.

22. The college has a disproportionately high number of students with behavioural and emotional difficulties, and in the past few years has been directed to admit a number of students who have been excluded from other schools. The level of fixed period and permanent exclusions for anti-social behaviour remains above national averages, but there has been a reduction in the number of exclusions in the past year and the college excludes fewer students than the majority of similar schools in the area. The college works effectively with the exclusions office and support services, and exclusion is used as a last resort. The work of the learning support department and behavioural support service has been effective in focusing on how behaviour is managed and good behaviour promoted throughout the college. A number of students are on report for various misdemeanours but the number of 'red cards' issued has fallen over the past year.

23. In the majority of lessons most students are interested in their work and have satisfactory work habits. In some subjects, such as art and religious education, interest is consistently good or very good. For example, in religious education lessons, students listened well to the teacher and to each other, concentrated and worked well together in pairs. In art, Year 9 students working on self-portraits were studying a range of objects and imagery relating to themselves and using them to develop their work in a personal and expressive way. However, the inspection team found that generally students are compliant rather than active learners, as was the case in the previous inspection. A significant number of students have limited study skills, and are very reliant on teachers. In many subjects students answer questions and contribute to class discussions quite freely, but they are generally more inclined to give factual answers than to express their own views and give opinions. They do not question, and are inclined to wait to be told what to do and how to do it. For example, in music, students lack self confidence in performing and many find it difficult to maintain concentration, interrupting the lesson with unnecessary remarks. In lower attaining sets in mathematics a number of students find it difficult to maintain their concentration over the full lesson and in some science lessons the poor behaviour of some individuals on occasion adversely affects the learning of others. In a number of lessons, particularly in lower sets in Years 9 and 10, there are high rates of absence, and in some lessons seen up to half the class was absent. Homework and some coursework is not completed by a significant minority of students, suggesting lack of interest in the work or commitment to learning, and resulting in a number of students not achieving their potential.

24. There are good relationships between students and staff in all parts of the college and relationships between students are generally good. In the learning resource centre during break and after college, students work amicably together at computers. In some lessons students show a good understanding of the impact of their actions on others and of the feelings, values and beliefs of others; in religious education this is a strength. In history, students studying 19th century politics were able to discuss different views about Ireland. However, some students lack social skills and find peer relationships difficult and there are few opportunities in lessons for group work to promote collaborative skills.

25. Attendance is still well below national averages, and is worst in Years 9 and 10, where the average attendance over the previous two terms was just under 84 per cent.

There has been an improvement in attendance and reduction in unauthorised absences in some year groups. The attendance of Year 7 over the past two terms has been just under 90 per cent, with only 0.57 per cent unauthorised absences, but Year 9 has almost three per cent unauthorised absences. The very poor and intermittent attendance of a significant minority of students has an adverse effect on their attainment. Assessment records show a number of students have significant gaps in their work and the work of their class is also affected since, when they do attend, teachers have to spend time ensuring they understand the work and know what to do. Punctuality has improved since the last inspection, but there is still something of a drift in at the start of the day.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

26. Teaching has improved substantially since the last inspection and is now good. It was good or better in nearly two-thirds of the 141 lessons observed. Two-fifths of the teaching was good; it was very good in nearly one-fifth and it was excellent in one lesson in 20. Teaching was unsatisfactory in eight of the 141 lessons and poor in one. This is significantly better than in the last inspection when about a fifth of lessons were judged unsatisfactory. Teaching is similar in overall quality at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, but there is proportionally more outstanding teaching and less that is unsatisfactory at Key Stage 4. In the small sample of lessons seen in the sixth form all teaching was at least satisfactory, and three-quarters was good or better.

27. Teaching is of a consistently good quality in most subjects. In the three core subjects, teaching was particularly strong in English, where over three-quarters was good or better. It was also strong in science, where this proportion was almost as high. In mathematics the great majority was satisfactory, with a quarter of lessons being good and one lesson unsatisfactory. There was an exceptionally high proportion of excellent and very good teaching in art, whilst in history the teaching was never less than good. In religious education it was often good or very good, and in information technology and music it was never less than satisfactory. In all the other subjects the quality of teaching varied: it was never less than satisfactory overall, though in some cases with the odd unsatisfactory lesson in contrast with the good or very good. The better teaching is enabling students to learn more effectively.

28. There are common strengths to the teaching. These include the effective teaching of literacy skills, good use of the teachers' subject knowledge to plan interesting lessons, and generally high expectations of how students should behave and what they can achieve.

29. Good teaching in English is supporting improved teaching and learning across the curriculum: most students in Key Stage 3 are now making good progress in literacy. In

most lessons across the curriculum, teachers place a good emphasis on literacy, with very effective use of key words for the lesson, which has a very positive impact on learning. The best science lessons, for example, have a very good focus on language and number in measurement, enabling students to improve basic skills and increase their understanding of scientific concepts. Students also make good progress in developing subject-specific skills, for example, in written French, in designing, and in the application of information and communications technology skills in English, geography, modern languages and business studies. However, they make only satisfactory progress in developing their number skills, because the teaching of numeracy needs to be better planned and co-ordinated. For example, standards and achievement are not high enough in science because key skills are not yet presented to students as a systematic and developing programme for each key stage.

30. Students' understanding is well developed by the effective use which teachers make of their subject knowledge in planning, explaining and questioning. This is especially true in art, where teachers are very skilful in leading critical discussion to deepen students' understanding. Other examples include history, where teachers make their very good subject knowledge accessible to students with well-focused and carefully graded questions, which challenge them to think as historians. In religious education, teachers are particularly good at explaining difficult terms and concepts in simpler language. Their questioning is challenging, with constant references to specialised vocabulary, which ensure that students' knowledge of them is good. On the other hand, in modern languages the rate of progress occasionally slows when students do not hear the foreign language spoken consistently.

31. Teachers plan their lessons well and make good use of time and resources, so as to maximise the pace and progress of students' learning. They move the learning on at a good pace, and generally divide the lesson into a number of activities, which help to develop and extend learning. This is a feature of some mathematics lessons where the use of three-part structure and change of activities gives momentum and keeps the pace brisk. In art the quality of planning for students' different needs is excellent throughout. Individualised teaching enables students of all levels of prior attainment to work confidently at an appropriately high level. A feature of modern language lessons is the close attention paid to providing a variety of tasks, so that all four language skills are developed. In English, detailed planning and provision of appropriate tasks is a significant factor in the improving standards of attainment. In a Key Stage 3 class, for instance, the teacher showed very good awareness of individual students' needs and a clear exposition of tasks, which enabled them to make very good progress in a book report session using information technology. In mathematics teachers know what is to be achieved and plan time and resources suitably, often leading to an increasing enthusiasm for the subject. However, there is still not enough variety of different teaching and learning strategies in mathematics lessons. The quality of learning was unsatisfactory in two physical education lessons because of the unsatisfactory condition of the facilities being used on those occasions.

32. Most students are now working at an appropriate level in most lessons because the level of challenge in teaching has improved since the last inspection, and is now often

good. The standards in art are attributable to the high expectations, which are a feature of the excellent teaching. In religious education open, searching questioning moves thinking to a higher level and many students accept the challenge well. Standards are improving gradually in science because one aspect of improved teaching is the more appropriate level of challenge. In a Year 7 class lower attaining students made very good gains because the teacher expected them to learn at a fast pace: they responded eagerly, sustaining effort and concentration. Standards are slowly improving, too, in music, because teachers are requiring more from students and are beginning to match work more closely to their separate abilities. In physical education there is much coaching of the more able students in extra-curricular activities. Expectations are sometimes too low in mathematics, however, which is a key reason why standards, especially of higher attaining students in Years 8 and 9, are not high enough.

33. In some lessons, however, there is too much learning directed by the teacher: students need more practice at working and finding solutions by themselves. This lack of direct involvement sometimes causes a small number of students to lose interest and does not build confidence, for example, in mathematics and music. In mathematics, there is some questioning to catch the imagination and stimulate discussion, but more is needed. Students are confident in asking for help, but too often many need reassurance that they are doing things correctly and wait for teacher rather than take initiatives.

34. Students with special educational needs make very good progress when taught in the learning support department because of the highly skilled teaching which they receive in their small groups. In mainstream classes, they make most progress where teachers work closely with the learning support assistants. Sometimes, however, teachers do not liaise closely enough with learning support assistants in planning lessons, so that the support available to students is not as effective as it might be. Opportunities are sometimes missed, for example, to involve learning support assistants in teaching small groups, thus freeing the teacher to work with other groups.

35. Although a significant minority of the students are identified as having emotional and behavioural difficulties, conditions for learning are satisfactory, and often good, in the majority of classes. This is because the teachers' management of behaviour is skilled in the great majority of lessons. They are alert to inattention and insist that students wait their turn to contribute and follow instructions. In the best lessons, relationships are relaxed and behaviour is good because students are always interested in working hard. Often, as for example in English, teachers manage some boys' potentially challenging behaviour well, with humour and a strong sense of purpose. In the best science lessons, teachers are very skilled in managing potential disruption, creating fresh learning situations to give students the best chance of reaching new targets for behaviour, but in some classes, there is too much tolerance of chatter. Very occasionally, in lessons where the teaching is unsatisfactory, there is not enough firmness in helping students develop self-control and improve social skills.

36. At best, students' interest in, and understanding of their work are supported by the effective use made of homework to extend work in lessons and to prepare for the next stage of learning. During the week of the inspection, the setting of homework was satisfactory, as, for example, in mathematics, where it was used well to consolidate learning. There are, however, gaps in the students' planners, which indicate that relevant homework has not always in the past been firmly established as an integral part of learning in all years or for all students. This is a key area where students' study skills need to be improved.

37. The good teaching across the college has had a significant impact on raising the quality of students' learning, which was good or better in over half of the lessons observed during the inspection. In most lessons, the quality of learning matches that of teaching, though overall, unlike the teaching, it is satisfactory rather than good. The main reason for this is the absenteeism of a minority of the students. These students fail to acquire knowledge and understanding, and to develop skills, because they miss too much education. Their return to class compounds the difficulties teachers have in meeting the wide range of learning needs.

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

38. The college has undertaken a very full review of the curriculum content and structure. Clear principles were established and applied consistently in curricular decision-making. There is still some unevenness and problems remain, but broadly the college's curriculum is of good quality.

39. As a result of the college's falling roll, now reversed, the number of teaching staff was reduced. An unfortunate result of this was the loss of dance and separately timetabled drama from the curriculum. This has reduced curricular breadth to some extent and has impacted negatively on an area of perceived strength within the college. However, curricular breadth and balance remain satisfactory overall and the statutory elements of the curriculum are fully in place in Key Stages 3 and 4. Now, with the college's roll rising, there are plans to develop and expand and enhance provision for the expressive and performing arts. The improving, and now satisfactory, range of extra-curricular activities is well supported and is beginning to make a more significant contribution to the broader college curriculum.

40. Many subject schemes of work have been recently revised and the overall quality is good. A strong feature in English is that all students, whatever their prior attainment, are introduced to the study of Shakespeare from Year 7 onwards, and enjoy and learn to understand the plays. In science, there is a good focus on practical skills and the process of investigation. A number of areas still require further development. For example, in music insufficient account is taken of students' very limited earlier musical experience. The programme of personal, social and health education provides an important contribution to the college's wider curriculum and is of good quality. It includes appropriate provision for sex education and the dangers of drug abuse. The quality of the teaching of this work is somewhat uneven, but is satisfactory overall.

41. A major improvement since the last inspection is the quality and effectiveness of provision for information and communications technology. Both the effective timetabled lessons, and the increasing and appropriate use of information and communications technology in other subjects of the curriculum, have transformed an area of weakness at the time of the last inspection into a strength of the college.

42. The success in making information and communications technology popular and successful is an example of the value of the drive over the last two years to strengthen and improve the quality of accommodation, facilities and resources for teaching and learning. This work has been driven by the college's improvement plan. It has also included a curriculum-led, major upgrading of facilities and opportunities for independent study, an aspect of learning seen as needing substantial development.

43. The Key Stage 4 curriculum provides satisfactory opportunities for choice, within a framework of good balance and relevance. The present constraints on choice result from the relatively low numbers in the year groups. As numbers increase, this will provide opportunities to extend choice, for example, within the humanities. At present equality of access and opportunity is satisfactory.

44. While the General National Vocational Qualification intermediate level courses offered in the sixth form are appropriate, they are not underpinned by any common additional provision. An example is the absence of the statutory religious education or of specially timetabled games or physical education. This is a reflection of the small numbers currently taking the courses and their marginal viability at this stage. There are indications that numbers opting for this route at 16+ may be increasing, in which case this aspect of the sixth form curriculum will require appropriate development. The quality of all the vocational courses is satisfactory, and the art and design course is very good indeed.

45. The curriculum structure, timetabling and student grouping arrangements reflect the thoughtful and considered approach to unified curricular planning. However, the constraints on timetabling in a relatively small college have resulted in some problems. The most serious of these, and one having an adverse affect on standards and quality, is the poor arrangements for proper setting in mathematics. Very properly, there are plans to correct this in the 2000/2001 timetable. Another weaker aspect of these arrangements, a rotational arrangement for the three sciences, separately staffed, in Key Stage 3, was introduced to cope with staffing difficulties. Plans are in place, including new staffing arrangements, which will permit a unified approach to Key Stage 3 science and improve progression in the next academic year.

46. Curricular provision for students with special educational needs is very good. The learning support department is very well organised and support is provided both within lessons across the curriculum and in withdrawal lessons in the learning support department. Care is taken to ensure that students are not disadvantaged by missing work in subject areas. Provision within the learning support department of literacy and numeracy groups is of very good quality. Learning support assistants usually make an effective contribution to curriculum provision both across the curriculum and in the learning support.

47. The vocational and careers education programme prepares students very well for the world of work and the next stage in their education. The careers department has a high profile in the college, is confidently led and has been most effectively resourced since the loss of all careers material in the fire. Students receive a progressive and relevant careers programme. The careers co-ordinator works effectively with key stage managers and subject co-ordinators, making good use of visitors and links with the business community to provide relevant information for students and staff. There is a very good focus on careers guidance and key skills in the personal, social and health education and good liaison with the Kent Careers Service and the Education Business Partnership. The college makes good use of information and communications technology to provide up to date information to students on career prospects and choices and to support letters of application, CVs and records of achievement.

48. The work experience programme in Year 10 provides a wide range of opportunities for students to gain first hand job experience, and is very well supported by the local business community. The local Chamber of Commerce and Education Business Partnership fully support the implementation of a meaningful work experience programme for which the students are very well prepared.

49. Since the last inspection the college has focused on extending its links with the community, reflected in the change of name to the Community College Whitstable. Links with the community now make a good contribution to the students' education. The college has appointed a community education and business manager to promote the college as a life long learning resource for students and their families, for local business and industry and the working community at large. For example, the college is now a centre for the University of Industry and a local language centre in the Kent European Language Programme run by Canterbury Christ Church University College. Following rebuilding after the fire the college now has a very good range of educational, conference and sporting facilities which are well used in college time, after college hours and in the holidays to the benefit of students and their families, and the local business community. The college offers mature students (including grandparents) the opportunity to work alongside students in lessons as well to take college, and other adult education nationally accredited courses out of college hours. The college also offers very well supported conference and training facilities to the business community. This community and business dimension to learning provides students with good role models. The college has very good networks within the business and artistic community, and is involved in various community projects in the town and further afield. For example, students are contributing to the Whitstable 2000 Arts project, and their work has been taken to Germany as part of the town twinning initiative. The college is well supported by sponsorship from a wide variety of organisations which enrich the curriculum, improve resources and support initiatives, including prizes for achievement and effort.

50. The college is developing more constructive links with its partner primary schools, which are now satisfactory. Students in Year 7 are positive about the quality of the induction programme. College learning support staff work with special needs co-ordinators in the primary sector to identify students who may have difficulties with transfer. Teaching staff in the primary school use the information and communications technology facilities of the college to support their training. However, there is a need for more curriculum links to develop continuity of experience and for staff in both stages of education to work together to raise students' attainment and improve basic skills.

51. Links with further education institutions are also beginning to be explored further. There is a need for more partnerships between the various different establishments, particularly to support the development of a more appropriate curriculum and wider opportunities for disaffected students, and to enable the sixth form students to make effective links with other similar establishments in the area to develop their particular interests and needs. There is also the need for closer links to support staff development and training and the sharing of expertise and resources.

52. The college makes good provision overall for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students. There is not yet a process for monitoring or evaluating the effectiveness of contributions made by the college as a whole and by separate subjects. Many of these contributions are strong, however, and the effect on students' values and behaviour is noticeable. The college now has a sense of clear objectives for provision in these areas. The strong mission statement, recent work on the environment, improvements in the support and guidance system and the use of PACE (punctuality, attendance, community and excellence) points for achievement all help to foster a sense of pride and have developed in students a belief in the college and increasing belief in themselves.

53. Provision for spiritual development is good. Daily assemblies for each student are of good quality. Based on an inspiring and thought-provoking programme of Thought for the Week, they provide many opportunities for reflection and worship, and fully comply with statutory requirements. They are dignified, well-planned occasions, based on a weekly theme, which, during the inspection was a quotation from the Latin poet Ovid: "There is no excellence without difficulty." For example, in a house assembly, prayer and reflection followed the theme of competing and winning, linked to Sports Day. Religious education also makes a strong contribution. In Year 9, for instance, students consider what it is like to be poor and oppressed, as victims of the Holocaust or of war and famine in Africa, and in a Year 10 lesson students shared the teacher's sense of wonder at the immensity of the universe and design in nature.

54. Provision for both moral and social development is good. The college is effective in communicating the standards of behaviour it expects, and staff relate well to students in a friendly, businesslike way. In assemblies and in many subjects students have opportunities to think about the reasons why people have acted in the way they have, and about the values which underpin this. In religious education, for example, students consider fairness, personal temptation, and discrimination against minorities. In geography and religious education they consider the values influencing decisions by people and governments, such as the distribution of wealth amongst nations.

55. Similarly, the college provides successfully for the development of students' social awareness. Responsibility for the environment, and tolerance and respect, are covered effectively in science, geography and religious education respectively. Students throughout the college are given chances to show that they can exercise responsibility for others and take initiatives, for example, on the College Council and as receptionists in Year 7. The Star Student of the Week award, celebrated in assemblies, helps foster a growing sense of self-esteem and pride in achievement. Still needing further development are chances for students to take more responsibility for their learning across the curriculum.

56. Provision for students' cultural development is satisfactory, but less well developed than other aspects of their personal development. Art makes a rich contribution, drawing from the full range of traditions across the world and through history. The college has close links with the local twinning association, which have led to the successful re-establishment of a French exchange programme. The continuing exchange with Whitstable's German twin town has extended to music concerts involving both German schools and local primary schools. However, theatre visits and, in physical education, a study of world dance only partly compensate for the absence from the curriculum of drama and dance as separate subjects. Comparative studies of world faiths in religious education help deepen students' understanding of the multi-ethnic world, but do not help them sufficiently to appreciate life in a culturally diverse Britain. Further broadening of students' cultural horizons is needed, for example, through music and food technology.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

57. Parents value the academic and pastoral support the college provides to promote students' progress and personal development. The majority of parents are pleased with the progress their children are making in the college and appreciate the high priority given to ensuring the welfare of students. The academic, pastoral, administrative and support staff are sensitive to the needs of students and work well as a team.

58. There has been a good focus on positive behaviour. Teachers are generally consistent in promoting good behaviour and positive attitudes in lessons and around the college and are good role models. Since the last inspection they are much more confident and consistent in dealing with students with challenging behaviour and emotional difficulties. The rewards system gives recognition to improvement, and there are clear sanctions for inappropriate behaviour. For example, in the science and English departments, teachers managed students' behaviour effectively through the good use of support staff, and there was a good balance between discussing behaviour with students and assertive discipline. The focus on managing behaviour, and links between the college and other agencies, such as the school psychology service, the health service and social services, have been effective in supporting students with behavioural and emotional problems and in providing support for families and carers.

59. The college provides very effective support for students with behavioural and emotional difficulties. The Canterbury Skills Counselling Service provides a confidential counselling service for students in the college and the two counsellors are very positive about the quality of care and concern shown by the college for the emotional well-being of students and the support they receive. Peer mediation is used most effectively to support students with emotional or social problems and where there have been fallings-out between friends. The high profile of the peer mediation service promotes a positive attitude to mutual support and an understanding of the needs of others. In interviews and discussions with students, they are confident that they feel safe in the college and that problems are dealt with effectively by staff.

60. Since the last inspection the college has established effective procedures for monitoring attendance and following up unexplained absences. It works most effectively with the Education Welfare Service to follow up the significant minority of students whose attendance is intermittent and very poor. The college makes good use of links with the police and community groups to identify and return any students seen out of school; students leaving the college during the day for legitimate reasons are given permission slips so that this can be confirmed. Parents are regularly reminded of their responsibilities and the importance of regular attendance in the prospectus, newsletters, letters home and in the governors' annual report. Good attendance and punctuality are promoted and rewarded through the PACE system and some displays. The learning support team supports and reintegrates students with emotional and behavioural difficulties into college or following exclusion. However, continued poor attendance by a significant minority of students, particularly in Key Stage 4, shows that more needs to be done to gain the support of a significant minority of parents, as well as students, who do not see the value of good attendance, to raise the profile of attendance through, for example, tangible rewards and peer pressure, and to provide a more appropriate curriculum to meet the needs of disaffected.

61. At the time of the last inspection, departmental arrangements for marking and basic assessment following National Curriculum requirements were considered reasonably appropriate. It was noted, however, that the outcomes of assessment were very little used to support curriculum planning or, in any systematic way, to improve achievement.

62. This has changed dramatically in the last two years, and, at senior management level, assessment is used in a much more sophisticated way. The systematic collation of assessment and other data and its analysis are now providing clear and detailed information about achievement and attainment throughout the college. There is now a sound basis for setting accurately-judged, whole-college, departmental and individual targets. The attainment and progress of individuals and cohorts can now be monitored across the whole curriculum. As the quality and range of data improve, its analysis is becoming sharper and target setting is becoming more precisely judged. Nonetheless, some from a current round of whole-college targets were not soundly based and set an inappropriate level of challenge for the time scale. A recent revision was better judged and presented ambitious but attainable targets. At whole-college level, high-quality assessment data is now providing a potent tool, which is being used to raise standards and improve the quality of provision.

63. These developments at the centre are now strongly reflected in departments. The use of effective systems to assess, to record, to analyse and to set well-judged targets, despite some remaining unevenness of quality, is good overall. Assessment is used effectively to improve students' achievement and raise standards, and is beginning to play a useful role in curricular planning. The useful self-assessment noted in the last inspection report has developed further within the context of more confident use of assessment. In science, students know and understand what they have achieved and how they can improve, and the analysis of assessment data is sharpening curricular planning. In art, carefully set individual targets are challenging, but attainable, and boost further the students' motivation.

64. Assessment arrangements for students with special educational needs are very good. A range of approaches has been developed since the last inspection. These inform staff of students' performance and are used to influence curriculum provision in the learning support department and in most areas of the curriculum. Comprehensive screening tests are used at the beginning of Year 7. The department carefully monitors students' progress and individual education plans are regularly updated with new targets. The learning support department gives good support to those who are emotionally and behaviourally disturbed and to their teachers. The special educational needs co-ordinator is very influential with students and staff and learning support assistants provide crucially important support in many lessons to students who otherwise would not be contained in mainstream classes. Assessment data is carefully monitored by the special educational needs co-ordinator to ensure that additional support for students is always properly targeted. Students' personal development and behaviour are carefully monitored. Statements and annual reviews are well written and meet statutory requirements.

65. Teaching and support staff know students very well. The pastoral system is effective in supporting students, who are confident they can talk to their form tutors if they have concerns. Key stage managers and their deputies are now monitoring the work of the form tutors, to enable them to identify areas where additional help is required. The pastoral team work effectively with the subject departments where difficulties with individual or groups of students arise, to develop appropriate strategies to support students. Parents value the way concerns are dealt with. The personal and social education programme is well focused on areas of academic and personal development such as relationships, peer pressure, key skills and study skills. This, together with other initiatives such as the homework club, and the form support time devoted to interviews with individual students, is proving effective in supporting students' academic progress as well as their personal development.

66. The college's arrangements for child protection are good. It works very closely with range of appropriate agencies to support students and families where there are concerns and staff have a good understanding of procedures. The personal and social education programme covers a range of child protection issues such as drug abuse, safety issues and health promotion and the peer mediators have been invited to attend a Child Line conference to extend the scope of their work and their role in promoting students' safety and well-being.

67. The college's procedures for dealing with sick and injured students are good. Staff responsible for first aid and welfare are appropriately trained and deal skilfully with accidents and incidents, although only the more serious incidents are recorded. However, there is no treatment room where sick and injured students can be dealt with in privacy.

68. Teachers have a good awareness of health and safety related issues and appropriate procedures are in place for monitoring health and safety around the college. However, there are no working shower facilities for students' use after sport, to the detriment of personal hygiene.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

69. Parents have a more positive view of the college than at the last inspection and they value the leadership and management responsible for the changes in the past few years. The majority of parents feel they are kept well informed about what is happening in the college and appreciate the accessibility of staff if they have concerns.

70. The college keeps parents well informed about the life of the college and developments through regular newsletters and other letters home, which are well written and support the college ethos. The entrance foyer has been very well developed to promote the work of the college, the achievement of students and to inform parents and visitors of the opportunities offered in the college. The committed and hard-working parents' teachers' and friends' association committee supports the work of the college, raising valuable funds for development and providing refreshments at social events. Its members appreciate the greater involvement and interest of staff in their activities, while the college greatly appreciates not only the contribution of the association to the life and work of the college but also the useful link it provides between staff and the parent body.

71. The college provides a satisfactory range of opportunities for parents to be involved in a partnership for learning, through consultation evenings, homework and student planners, curriculum evenings and events. However, almost half the parents responding to the inspection questionnaire, and those attending the meeting with the registered inspector, expressed concerns about homework, particularly about the amount and inconsistencies in Key Stage 3. During the inspection, homework was set appropriately but staff did not always ensure students recorded this. A scrutiny of homework diaries revealed gaps in the previous term, and discussions with staff and students showed that work was not always handed in, marked or checked.

72. Parents receive interim reports giving information on effort and attainment and full annual reports on the work covered and areas for improvement, but these full reports are not extensive and in some subjects, information on the work covered is rather limited and targets for improvement are vague. Attendance at consultation evenings, transition and option evenings is not high, although it is better at Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 4. Further strategies are required to encourage parents to be much more involved in their children's learning, and in particular to gain their support for regular attendance, the return of coursework and homework and in attending consultation sessions.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

73. The college has made very good progress since the last inspection. There is considerable evidence of real progress in every aspect of its work and this is set out in detail throughout this report. Key areas in which this is most noticeable include the quality of teaching and learning; the ethos of the college, especially the behaviour of the students and their pride in the college; the provision for students with special educational needs and the teaching of literacy; the assessment of students' progress and the use of assessment data to raise standards. Given the short time since the headteacher's appointment (just over two years), and the serious weaknesses identified in the inspection just before that, it is not surprising that previous years' National Curriculum test and GCSE results have not yet reflected these improvements. Nevertheless, the standards which the present students are reaching show a marked improvement, and are much closer to their potential. Standards are not high enough, and this is clearly recognised by the college. However, a careful analysis of all the data provided, including mock examination results and improvements in literacy, together with the inspectors' evaluation of the college's improved assessment systems, indicate that examination results are likely to rise significantly over the next few years.

74. Since the last inspection, when leadership was described as weak, there has been very substantial improvement in the quality of leadership and management at all levels, which is now good.

75. By far the most significant factor in the remarkable recovery, from a very low base, which the college has made in the past two years, has been the outstanding and exceptionally effective leadership of the headteacher. He provides an extremely clear educational direction for the work of the college, based on an accurate and realistic assessment of its strengths and weaknesses and how it can and should develop. Importantly, he succeeds in sharing this vision with his staff, both teaching and support staff, and most have responded very well. He leads by example and is accessible to staff, students and parents. He takes care to consult the staff and to involve them in decision-making where appropriate, yet his leadership is firm and decisive where necessary.

76. The college has had no deputy head since the appointment of the present headteacher, in order to reduce staffing costs. The "leadership" (senior management) team is composed of the headteacher and three senior teachers. The headteacher works very closely with these senior colleagues, who identify closely with, and strongly support, his vision for the college. They are hardworking and loyal, provide useful role models of effective teaching and play an important part in the line management system described below. However, although the governors' decision not to appoint a deputy head is

understandable in the light of the college's budget deficit, it places additional demands upon the headteacher at a very challenging time.

77. The quality of leadership provided by heads of subject departments has improved significantly since the last inspection and most heads of departments are now providing a firm lead to their staff in planning, improving the quality of teaching and in raising standards of students' achievement. Leadership is outstanding in the learning support department, where provision for students with special educational needs is now very good, having improved from a very low base. It is good in a number of other subjects and satisfactory in the rest. Effective leadership has led to a rapid improvement in modern languages; it is a major contributory factor in the good quality teaching and rising standards in English, history and religious education. The work of form tutors is well led, supported and monitored by the key stage managers and their deputies.

78. The college has a well-established line management structure, with lines of accountability between senior teachers, middle managers and teachers in their departments, and with more senior staff responsible directly to the headteacher. This system generally works well and there is much useful contact between the various participants. However, its operation could be more sharply focused by more regular, timetabled meetings between senior teachers and heads of departments, which would avoid the natural tendency to concentrate on problem areas.

79. At the heart of the line management system is the regular observation by both senior and middle managers of classroom teaching. This has been linked to in-service training on specific areas requiring development, such as behaviour management and providing for the needs of students of differing abilities. This dual approach has undoubtedly been a key factor in the significant improvement in the quality of teaching across the college since the last inspection. However, the focus of classroom observation has been largely on the input of the teacher. It now needs to shift towards the students, so that effectiveness of teaching is judged by its impact on learning, rather than what the teacher does. Nevertheless, the observation of classroom teaching has generated much useful discussion about the effectiveness of teaching, teachers are used to being observed, and the college is now well placed to implement the new requirements for performance management.

80. The governing body is well led and is now well informed about the college's strengths and weaknesses, much more so than at the time of the last inspection. There is a much greater level of trust and confidence between the governors and the headteacher. They identify closely with the latter's vision for the college. They have a clearer understanding of their role. They are properly involved in strategic planning, for example, through the college improvement plan, and in financial planning and monitoring. Each governor is attached to a subject department and is expected to visit it once a term, to be briefed about its situation and to observe lessons. The governing body's structure of committees enables it to meet its statutory obligations. The only matter in which they fall short of fully doing so is by failing to provide religious education in the sixth form.

81. Planning and monitoring are now strengths of the college. The college improvement plan in particular is well structured, detailed and a very effective tool for further improvement. The college collects and makes good use of a wealth of data on its students and uses this to analyse its effectiveness and to set targets. Target setting and monitoring of performance are more variable, and less rigorous in some departments, for example, mathematics.

82. There have been considerable changes in the teaching staff in the past two years, and some 40 per cent have been appointed within that time, including seven of the heads of departments. The college has succeeded, despite the difficulties of attracting staff to the area, of recruiting sufficient qualified teachers to cover the curriculum. There is a good match in most subjects between the teachers' qualifications and the requirements of the curriculum. The in-service training programme is closely geared to training needs identified in the college improvement plan.

83. The college buildings provide sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of the curriculum and have been greatly improved since the last inspection, following a major fire in the main teaching block. The new library and resources centre and associated suite of rooms are quite exceptionally spacious and well equipped. The general state of the buildings now provides a much better learning environment than before, which the students appreciate.

84. The provision of learning resources is satisfactory overall, though there are strengths and weaknesses. Information and communications technology provision is now very good, with a high ratio of modern computers for the number of students. On the other hand, there are still shortages of text books in some areas, including English and mathematics, so that students are not always able to take them home for their homework. The library book stock has been largely replaced since the fire, though gaps still remain. The art department lacks the facilities to extend the use of a craft process to a high and demanding level. In design and technology, the low allowance for consumables restricts the students' creativity.

85. The college budget has been in deficit now for a number of years, mainly due to falling rolls. This deficit is being reduced in line with a three-year budget reduction plan agreed with the local education authority and the student roll is now rising. From September the college will benefit from changes in the local authority funding arrangements for schools with rising rolls. Nevertheless, the financial constraints deriving from the deficit cause adverse effects in key areas. These include the lack of a deputy head referred to above, a high student-teacher ratio, which results in some classes being very large, and a reduction in the finance available to provide learning resources in subject areas.

86. Given the constraints on the budget, financial planning is good. The budget deficit is now under control. The college makes very good use of the specific grants which it receives, especially those for students with special educational needs, which are well targeted. Finance for subject departments is judiciously divided between on-going needs and funding for developments, which have to be justified by reference to identified targets in the college improvement plan. The college makes good use of its buildings to generate income and has specific plans to increase this substantially in the next three years. One area which is not cost-effective at present is the sixth form, because the income which its small numbers generate falls well short of the cost. A realistic forecast of numbers likely to return next September indicates that this deficit will be reduced, but it will remain. The college has understandable reasons for providing a sixth form at this stage, not least the need to attract students, but it will need to keep the situation under close review. Despite this, the college makes good use overall of the resources at its disposal.

87. The financial systems of the college have not been audited by the LEA since 1996, so that it is not possible for inspectors to make a definitive judgement about their soundness. However, the bursar keeps a close watch on expenditure and provides a detailed, computerised update to the governors' finance committee twice a term. The college has regard to the principles of best value, for example by comparing the costs of service providers and carefully evaluating the quality of its educational provision. Its use of comparative data on expenditure in other schools is relatively underdeveloped.

86. The last inspection judged that the school was providing unsatisfactory value for money. Given the quality of the education which the college provides, especially the quality of teaching, the satisfactory, and often good, achievement of the students and their generally good attitudes and behaviour, together with the good use which the college makes of the resources at its disposal, the college now provides good value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

The headteacher and the governing body should:

- **Continue to raise standards, including National Curriculum test and GCSE results, in line with the College Improvement Plan** (paragraphs 6, 7, 18).
- **Raise standards of attainment in mathematics** (paragraphs 3, 6).
- **Improve the attendance of the minority of students who fail to attend, by:**
 - continuing to develop closer links with those parents who condone their children's absence (paragraph 72);
 - seeking to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of disaffected students (paragraph 23);
 - providing tangible rewards and utilising peer pressure to encourage good attendance (paragraph 25).
- **Improve aspects of teaching so that the quality and effectiveness of learning are enhanced, by focusing clearly on:**
 - meeting the needs of students of differing levels of ability and attainment (paragraphs 31, 32);
 - involving learning support staff more closely in the planning of learning for individuals and small groups (paragraph 34);
 - enabling students to work independently by developing their study skills (paragraphs 23, 33);
 - consistently setting homework which is challenging but achievable, and which extends the work done in lessons (paragraphs 36, 71).

- managing students' behaviour (paragraph 35);
- **Promote and foster a closer partnership with, and involvement of, parents.**
(paragraph 72)

In addition, the governing body should also consider the following minor weaknesses identified in this report:

- i) The monitoring and support of teaching should be strengthened by:
 - analysing and sharing the good practice which exists in the college;
 - evaluating the teaching by reference to its impact on learning;
 - ensuring that monitoring by heads of departments is uniformly rigorous in all subjects (paragraphs 78-81).
- ii) The college should provide a programme of religious education in the sixth form, as required by law (paragraph 80).

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	141
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	48

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
5	18	40	33	4	1	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7– Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	659	11
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	159	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	29	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	268	5

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	1

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	54
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	43

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	13.4
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.0
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	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	1999	55	67	122

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	21	28	19
	Girls	29	20	9
	Total	50	48	28
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	41 (72)	39 (41)	23 (34)
	National	63(65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	2 (34)	15 (11)	2 (7)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	34	32	26
	Girls	48	31	33
	Total	82	63	59
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	67 (63)	52 (44)	48 (33)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	26 (22)	10 (16)	16 (2)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	60	48	108

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	4	42	53
	Girls	6	39	44
	Total	10	81	97
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	9 (19.2)	75 (77)	90 (92)
	National	46.6 (44.6)	90.9 (89.8)	95.8 (95.2)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	18 (24.5)
	National	38.0 (36.8)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	0	N/a
	National		N/a

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	3
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	4
Indian	2
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	3
Chinese	0
White	650
Any other minority ethnic group	6

Exclusions in the last school 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	86	3
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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 – Y12

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	36
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.9

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y12

Total number of education support staff	12
Total aggregate hours worked per week	261

Deployment of teachers: Y7– Y12

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

Key Stage 3	25.6
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Financial information

Financial year	1998-1999
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	£
Total income	1601889
Total expenditure	1576168
Expenditure per pupil	2539
Balance brought forward from previous year	-31944
Balance carried forward to next year	-6223

Key Stage 4	24.0
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Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

670

Number of questionnaires returned

92

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	37	44	15	3	0
My child is making good progress in school.	37	44	12	3	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	14	42	25	16	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	17	36	30	14	3
The teaching is good.	23	51	17	4	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	33	48	16	2	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	50	40	4	3	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	50	38	9	0	3
The school works closely with parents.	26	48	17	4	5
The school is well led and managed.	36	44	6	9	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	29	47	11	4	9
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	24	50	6	3	16

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

ENGLISH

89. All the teachers of English in the college are having a significant impact on the improving performance of students in this subject.

90. On entry to the college, the students' prior attainment is well below average. In the past few years, standards achieved in national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 have been well below the national average for all schools. Boys have consistently achieved better standards than the girls have in recent years. At the end of Key Stage 4 standards in English at GCSE have also been well below average. In GCSE literature, which in recent years has been entered by a relatively small proportion of the students, standards have been below average except in 1998, when the results of a larger than usual entry were in line with the national average and above those for similar schools. However, standards are rising, both in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. Work seen in the present Year 9 demonstrates standards which, whilst still below the national average for all schools, are in line with those of other secondary modern schools. Equally, in Key Stage 4, the students currently in Year 11 came in with very low previous attainment. They also attained well below average results when they reached the end of Key Stage 3. The standard of the work which they have presented in preparation for the GCSE examinations, however, while still below the national average, is broadly in line with standards in similar schools. Achievement is therefore good at both key stages.

91. The standards of speaking and listening are variable at both key stages. Although some students are articulate in class and group discussions and are able to argue their point of view convincingly, many give short comments and answers that are sometimes expressed in casual language that does not make their meaning clear. They are listen to and understand their teachers, but are less able to listen to each other with interest and understanding. Standards of reading aloud also vary, with the most able students performing with fluent and clear expression, but others more hesitantly, suggesting that more opportunities to practise this skill are needed. Many students, however, pursue their own reading with enjoyment and they show good understanding of the plot and characters in demanding plays such as *Romeo and Juliet*, as well as more accessible books like *Buddy*. At Key Stage 4 they make perceptive comments on themes such as ambition in *Macbeth* and intolerance in *Of Mice and Men*, and support their points with suitable quotations. Students with special educational needs show their understanding of the stories they have read and write a book review on the word-processor. In their written work, some students in Year 7 organise their ideas into paragraphs and their spelling and grammar are of average accuracy. A significant number of students, however, still have difficulty with the basic skills and they are unable to produce an accurately punctuated and clearly expressed essay. By the end of Key Stage 3, their writing becomes more sustained, complex and interesting to read, and the higher achievers produce writing in a variety of styles. For example, a Year 9 class wrote some very convincing newspaper reports of the Aberfan disaster. During Key Stage 4 the students show an increasing command of the written language, and, although their vocabulary remains rather unadventurous, they make good progress in a range of writing tasks, including detailed commentaries on the literature studied for GCSE examinations.

92. The students' behaviour in English lessons is generally good, and very good in the smaller groups in all years. They show an enthusiastic readiness to answer questions and to volunteer to read that is more marked during Key Stage 3. In some Year 10 classes there is a degree of inertia that the teachers have to work hard to overcome. Any drama activity is much enjoyed, and most students have a good level of involvement in group and class discussions. Some students at both key stages, however, have a tendency to lose concentration and switch off during the last quarter of the lesson unless they are fully engaged in a task.

93. The overall quality of teaching and learning in English is good at Key Stage 3 and very good at Key Stage 4. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen during the inspection; in four out of every five lessons seen it was good or better and in a third of them it was very good or excellent. Teachers show a very good awareness of individual students' needs and they are adept at teaching the basic skills that enable students to make progress. They plan lessons very carefully so that the students build on their previous knowledge and developing skills. Students are encouraged and challenged to succeed; for example, everyone in a middle band Year 10 group was expected to gain at least a grade C in the GCSE. All students study Shakespeare from Year 7 onwards: a Year 8 class explored the characters in *Romeo and Juliet* through improvisation before they watched the balcony scene on a videotape with total involvement and enjoyment. By effectively grouping the students and providing appropriate tasks, the teachers enable the students to learn from each other. They manage the students' behaviour with good humour and a strong sense of purpose, so providing them with a secure environment for learning. Work is marked regularly with helpful and encouraging comments that enable students to develop a good understanding of their own progress.

94. The college has a very clear policy for the development of literacy skills across the whole curriculum, and this is well implemented by most departments, some of which (science, geography and religious education) have their own subject-specific strategy. All departments display most frequently used words on classroom walls to reinforce the students' confidence in using appropriate vocabulary. Displays of their written work encourage high standards of presentation. There are good opportunities in many subjects to develop speaking and listening skills in pair and group work as well as in class discussion. The clear emphasis on key words by teachers in many subjects provides students with a wider vocabulary that they use with increasing accuracy in their written work. Overall, the consistent application of the college's literacy policy is leading to a steady improvement in these essential skills.

95. The leadership of the department is very good, providing a clear sense of direction towards improved literacy skills and achievement for all students. The well-qualified team of teachers shares a common sense of purpose and enthusiasm for their subject. English is taught in a pleasantly furnished suite of rooms with excellent displays of students' work and helpful advice. Space is limited, however, and the small size of the rooms makes it difficult to regroup and vary the learning activities for larger classes. In some lessons students share texts and they are unable to take their own copy home, which restricts the opportunities for productive homework.

96. Since the last inspection, the English department has made very good progress. All students, including those with special educational needs, now make good progress, and target setting is effectively used to raise their expectations. The policy to match the work set to students' previous attainment is now followed by all teachers. Further improvement could be achieved by the use of more secondary questioning, to encourage students to develop their own ideas more fully, and by making more formal demands on them to improve their speaking and listening skills through prepared presentations, formal debates and listening exercises. Increased opportunities to practise reading aloud in small groups would also be helpful to many students. Although the broad and balanced Programme of Study takes account of different levels of learning need, teachers should be alert to the wide range of ability within some banded teaching groups and provide more differentiated tasks when necessary.

MATHEMATICS

97. Students enter the college with mathematical skills and knowledge that are well below national expectations. They make satisfactory progress and this leads to satisfactory achievement at the end of Key Stage 3. This is shown by a steady improvement in standards, for example, the Key Stage 3 results at the end of Year 9. However, the 1999 results were still well below national averages, and below those for similar schools. Students in the current Years 8 and 9 are not achieving well enough to make up the ground from their weak starting point on entry to the college. Scrutiny of work in the current Year 7 shows action taken by the college since the last inspection is resulting in more rapid progress and, for some of them, achievement is good.

98. By the end of Year 9, higher attaining students reach standards that are close to the national average, as demonstrated by their skills in handling algebraic expressions, finding unknown angles in diagrams using parallel lines, and calculating percentages of quantities.

99. The standards reached by students at the end of Key Stage 4 are well below average, though some students reach standards that are in line with national averages. This is confirmed by the results in the GCSE in 1999, which were also well below the average for similar schools. Since the last inspection, results have fluctuated in the proportion of students reaching grades A* to C, and this proportion was lower last year than the year before. These results reflect the attainment of that year group at the end of Key Stage 3. As in Key Stage 3, students in the current Year 11 are not achieving well enough to make up lost ground. The amount of absenteeism is also a contributory factor in this. However, nearly all students are entered for the examination and nearly all who take the examination receive a pass grade. Achievement across the key stage is therefore satisfactory. Scrutiny of the work in the current Year 10 shows that, as for Year 7, action taken by the college since the last inspection is resulting in more rapid progress.

100. In both key stages, in order to raise standards more rapidly, students need to increase the amount of homework, revision and classwork which they do. Absence, together with the reduction in the number of lessons, to three a week, for Years 10 and 11, make this difficult. There are also insufficient textbooks for most students to use for homework, which results in over-reliance on worksheets. Sometimes students write answers in spaces provided on these sheets rather than writing out their working. These factors all make it more difficult to improve achievement and raise standards.

101. Throughout the college students achieve similar standards across all aspects of mathematics, reflecting the balanced course they receive. Most students can choose the appropriate standard techniques and apply them correctly to get the right answer to a problem. However, middle and lower attaining students are not as skilled in explaining, in writing or orally, how they have arrived at the answer. Students, especially in Key Stage 3, have some opportunities to improve their numeracy skills systematically. However, most students need much more practice to improve speed and accuracy. Many place too much reliance on the use of calculators, even for simple calculations. Students have satisfactory skills in applying information technology in their mathematics work, due to planned opportunities to develop and use them.

102. In other subject areas, students' number skills are well below average. They are too often reliant on calculators for simple sums, although their number skills are usually adequate for the demands placed on them. For example, in geography students in Year 9 can put information about the national wealth of different countries in rank order. In design and technology they carry out research and represent data collected using graphs, for example, bar charts. However, the skills needed for science are sometimes not strong enough. Although students can interpret and draw graphs, a Year 10 class found it difficult to identify angles of plant cell structures. Students need more practice to improve their number skills. There is no whole-college numeracy policy to co-ordinate work in other subject areas and systematically to build on, and improve, their existing skills.

103. Students with special educational needs make similar progress to others in their classes, particularly when additional staff support is available. Some of these students attend numeracy workshops and these are effective in raising standards. Students in a lower attaining Year 10 group, nearly all with special needs, made good progress using a computer program to improve their numeracy skills. To follow that, the teacher had also prepared different worksheets for different students to help them consolidate skills and to address specific weaknesses through written work. The lesson went well because the additional staff support enabled the teacher to concentrate on teaching, rather than spending too much time dealing with behavioural problems.

104. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. During the inspection, the teaching was good in a quarter of lessons observed. In the remainder it was satisfactory, with the exception of one lesson where it was unsatisfactory. Teachers' specialist knowledge is good, and they are able to explain ideas and methods clearly. They use diagrams, charts and models well to help students understand new ideas. This approach helps middle and lower attaining students particularly to make progress, as they find it easier dealing with practical examples. Higher attaining students are provided with suitable work, usually harder examples on the same themes as others in the class. The few students in Year 10 and 11 who want to follow a course leading to the highest GCSE grades are well supported through appropriate individual programmes.

105. In most lessons there is a good introduction, often using a short mental arithmetic "warm up", which leads into a clear description of what students are going to do in the main part of the lesson. In lessons where the teaching is good, there is also a summary of key points at the end, often using questions and answers to get students to think about what they have learned. This helps them to remember it, and often homework is then set to build further on this.

106. Although most students work hard and are well behaved, at times teachers have to work harder than they should to keep students on task. This is particularly true in some middle and lower attaining classes in both key stages. In the one lesson where teaching was unsatisfactory it was because class management was not strong enough to make sure that all students were on task, and working hard for the duration of the lesson. The grouping arrangements in Years 8 and 9 are such that there is often a wide range of prior attainment in the class, which can be hard to manage. Some students, although wanting to put forward answers and ideas, find it difficult to wait for their turn and want to be heard immediately. Partly to deal with this, teachers sometimes spend too much time working through problems with individuals rather than discussing these with the whole class. A minority of students find it difficult to start unless work has been explained to them individually, even though tasks and methods have been explained clearly to the whole class. Students from all year groups appreciate the amount of help they get, both in and outside class. When the teaching is good, more time is spent in whole class discussion, explaining and thinking about different ways of dealing with problems. This helps students to achieve more. For example, in one higher attaining Year 7 class, students made good progress as a result of discussion sparked by the questions why and how different answers were arrived at. They learnt by listening to others and exploring ways of doing things different to their own. Teachers' feedback on written work is helpful and encouraging. This good individual support is an important factor in improving standards.

107. Homework is set regularly but in some classes teachers have problems in making sure all students complete it. These students, in spite of departmental sanctions and follow-up systems, do not feel it is important to do so.

108. The college has identified the priorities for raising achievement, and satisfactory progress has been in dealing with many of the issues from the last inspection report, but monitoring and evaluation of the work of the department need to be more effective. Standards have begun to improve but the pace of improvement needs to be more rapid to raise students' achievement further, as standards in mathematics are below those in English and science. More students in Year 10 now follow a course leading to higher grades at GCSE. The provision of textbooks is improving and it is planned to set Year 8 and 9 students for mathematics in 2000-2001. Teaching has improved, for example, through using a three-part lesson structure, including short mental arithmetic "warm ups" at the beginning.

SCIENCE

109. The department is beginning to make a difference to the achievements of students. Changes in staffing have resulted in a committed team with a clear sense of direction, reflecting the strong aims of the college to improve standards. Attainment and teaching have improved since the last inspection. Examination results have shown gradual improvement over the most recent period of two years.

110. The proportion of students reaching the expected level 5 in the 1999 end of Key Stage 3 tests was well below the national average for all schools. The proportion of students reaching the higher level 6 was also very low compared with the national average. Girls did not perform as well as boys, with both well below national averages. When compared with similar schools, results were also well below average.

111. At the end of Key Stage 4, the 1999 examination results were well below the national average for all schools. For those students taking the double award, the proportion achieving the higher grades A* to C was well below average, but that of those achieving the grades A* to G by contrast was above average. In single award science, the proportion achieving grades A* to C was low compared with the national average and that achieving the grades A* to G was well below average. When compared with similar schools, results were also well below average. However, comparisons with the students' own performance in other subjects show that girls and boys perform better than might be expected in double award sciences, whilst lower attaining boys perform less well in single award science. The college has shown a gradual improvement in the numbers of students entering the higher level examination papers, reflecting an overall improvement in the performance of the students.

112. The high number of students with continued periods of long-term absence affects the overall attainment against national and similar school comparisons in both key stages. Additionally, at Key Stage 4, a number of students are absent for external module tests that contribute to the final examination grade. A number fail to complete course work, receiving a lower examination grade that might otherwise be the case.

113. Inspection findings indicate that standards are higher than those shown by the 1999 results. Attainment is below, but not well below, the national average for all schools at the end of both key stages. Students in the higher bands generally reach national standards in each Attainment Target. They use scientific language appropriately to explain scientific ideas, although lower attaining students find this more difficult. More able students reach average standards in the use of number and in the application of number to analyse experimental results, but the majority of students find such tasks more difficult. They reach appropriate standards in preparing graphs but find analysis and evaluation of information more challenging. They do not reach high enough standards in the use of information and communications technology to record and analyse information, but recent use of new facilities is having a rapid effect on improving standards. Standards are appropriate in Year 10 in the investigation process of planning, obtaining, recording and evaluating evidence, but are not yet high enough in Key Stage 3. However, recent improvements are raising standards in this key stage.

114. The students' achievements are satisfactory at both key stages. Students reach appropriate standards in lessons because teachers take time to consider scientific language. For example, in Year 9, they improve their understanding of water movement through plants by high quality discussion led by the teacher, helping them clarify the meaning of terms and gaining better insight into the ideas governing the process. They gain a good appreciation of energy requirements of plants, beginning to understand chemical equations for photosynthesis and respiration through arguing their own ideas. The examination of a small sample of investigations by Year 11 shows the extent to which the emphasis on scientific terminology helps them write successful experimental accounts, drawing effective conclusions. Higher attaining students are developing good skills in problem solving and are gaining confidence in communicating their ideas in class discussion. The achievement of lower attaining students, particularly those with special educational needs, is more variable. They learn well when they have additional adults in class. However, it is hard for them to make better than satisfactory progress in the absence of personal help, because materials to support writing do not match their needs closely enough and reading materials are often too difficult for them.

115. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Teaching was good in a third of the lessons observed and very good in almost another third. Teaching in Year 10 is good, but it is more variable in Key Stage 3. The one unsatisfactory lesson resulted from inadequate preparation of time and practical resources, leading to students becoming discouraged and frustrated. The timetable for most students in Key Stage 3 affects them adversely because they see different teachers each week and lack continuity, as is evident in the presentation of their written work. This point is well understood and the college already has improved arrangements for the coming year.

116. A strength of the teaching lies in the high expectations teachers have for students to gain good subject knowledge. They convey information well through effective presentation and demonstration. The very good lessons encourage students to explore scientific ideas for themselves through practical investigation, fostering abilities in problem solving. For example, Year 10 students made good gains in understanding the electrical principle of resistance through practical exploration of a variety of conductive materials. Year 7 students made good progress in grasping the differences between solids, liquids and gases by carrying out a series of stimulating observations. Higher attaining students in Year 8 applied their knowledge of sound in confidently using computers to draw graphs, explaining the shape of the curve.

117. The teaching of basic skills is becoming more consistent, which has a positive effect on achievement. For example, all lessons include key words. Lower attaining groups are given time to spell words correctly and learn the meanings of scientific terms. In one lesson a good piece of creative writing was given as homework, encouraging students to increase their imaginations and reasoning powers. Similarly, lower attaining groups are given good support in the use of number. For example, a Year 10 group was successful in calculating the cost of an electricity bill because of good teaching support.

118. Planning is satisfactory. Lesson objectives are clear and in the best lessons, teachers give students a clear sense of purpose by carefully explaining how they will improve knowledge and skills during the lesson. Lessons usually have a good pace but sometimes lack variety, emphasising increase in knowledge very well, but lacking time for students to make gains in skills. In the most successful lessons, teachers and support assistants take care to support students further by monitoring progress whilst they are working. The completion of lessons is sometimes too rushed. Teachers do not always require students to speak formally about what they have learned and this reduces the usefulness of the lesson.

119. Assessment has improved since the last inspection. Students are beginning to have a good understanding of how to improve through good marking and detailed discussion of their work. The good work in assessment is beginning to give students confidence to participate much more in setting targets for improvement. There is currently no system for assessing their progress in the use of information and communications technology. Teachers set homework regularly, expecting students to complete homework diaries, but students do not always use them.

120. The monitoring of students' skills needs to be made more systematic to ensure continual improvement in their achievement. The department has improved continuity through each key stage through improved schemes of work and is in a position to incorporate key skills, including those of information and communication technology year by year. The team now needs to set targets for groups of students, to ensure they raise their achievement consistently year by year.

121. Students generally have positive attitudes to learning and behave well in lessons because teachers have good relationships with them. They respond very well to lively teaching and to praise. Higher ability students are serious minded about their work. However, a number in lower groups require constant reminders to stay on task, easily becoming restless. Consequently valuable time is spent in supporting their renewed efforts. These individuals underachieve because they cannot sustain concentration for the required period. Most students participate in discussion, although some are rather reserved until prompted. They usually support each other well, talking about ideas when they find them difficult. All students respond sensibly to fulfilling safety procedures.

ART AND DESIGN

122. The art department is of exceptional quality, provides an effective art education and enables students to achieve beyond expectations and attain high standards.

123. Students enter the college with standards of attainment in art well below average, and lower than at the time of the last inspection. The broad and inclusive art curriculum and the excellent scheme of work, together with clearly-focused and individualised teaching, enable them to make outstanding progress. This is especially evident in Year 7, when both learning and achievement are very good indeed. The students are enabled to develop high levels of practical skills in the use of media, in drawing of many kinds, and in the handling of images. The development of knowledge of art is impressive. Students are able to study the work of artists and designers with sensitivity and understanding, are able to learn from artists' work and use this knowledge to inform and develop their own practical creative work. They develop well-honed critical skills, and acquire a useful specialist vocabulary of art terms, which facilitates discussion and debate, as well as deeper understanding.

124. Students are well motivated and work hard in art. They are lively, thoughtful and resourceful in their work. They are capable of undertaking individual independent study and can use reference books within the context of their work effectively. Appropriate homework and use of the newly reintroduced working sketchbooks are important factors. The books can often be used to record such study. Most students set themselves ambitious personal targets and enjoy the satisfaction of doing well: achievement is at least good throughout Key Stage 3. By the end of this stage overall attainment has risen to the national average for all schools. The skill with which teaching takes account of the needs of every individual ensures that all students, including those with talent and high levels of capability and those with learning difficulties and very low prior attainment, achieve well and attain standards beyond expectations. Many students attain the highest standards.

125. Art is a popular subject in Key Stage 4, but the option groups contain a minority of students of high prior attainment and very many students with special educational needs. Very good progress is made through Years 10 and 11 and all students achieve impressively, better than noted at the time of the last inspection. Learning skills, especially independent study abilities, develop well. The high ambitions of students thrive on the high expectations within the excellent teaching to foster high levels of attainment. The working relationships and atmosphere in the studios approach the ideal. At the time of the last inspection, and in subsequent years, results in the GCSE have been broadly at the national average for all schools. This includes an appropriate proportion of the high grades of A*, A and B, but lower grades achieved often record very impressive individual effort and success. The folders of work by Year 11 students and the work in progress in Year 10 suggest that standards in the subject are rising further.

126. The sixth form course leading to a General National Vocational Qualification has also been successful since its introduction. This year the high-quality work programme, excellent teaching and impressive achievement by students are resulting in standards of attainment in art higher than the course expectation. Students have clearly derived great personal benefit from the course and all are moving into further education to obtain higher qualifications in the subject.

127. The success of the department is fostered by the excellent, quiet and unassuming leadership of the head of department and the commitment and outstanding ability of the teachers. The overall quality of the teaching seen was excellent, an improvement on the good standards noted at the time of the last inspection. The achievements of the department are not easily won. Accommodation for art is no more than adequate, and the rooms are overcrowded by the large teaching groups. The single 45 or 50-minute lesson in Key Stage 3 is really too short for worthwhile practical work, but the near-impossible is accomplished. Learning resources are well chosen and used, but funding is barely adequate to meet the modest demands of the planned Programmes of Study. The essential working sketchbooks were only very recently reintroduced following a period in which financial constraints had necessitated the use of separate pieces of scrap paper. The department lacks the facilities to extend the use of a craft process to a high and demanding level. It is to be hoped that when the opportunity arises, these handicaps can be addressed.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

128. The department has improved in many areas since the last inspection. On entry to the college in Year 7, students' attainment in design and technology is well below the national average. The standards of work at Key Stage 3 from lessons and teacher assessments, indicate that students' skills in making items have improved to the extent that the students are just in line with national averages. Skills in designing are not yet as good as the national average. These standards are very creditable considering students' prior attainment. Students have made good progress in learning basic technical terminology, understanding properties of materials and in the accurate use of tools and equipment. Having acquired these skills, they do well in making a variety of food dishes, moving wooden toys and designing nightlights. Students with special educational needs make good progress when skilfully assisted by classroom assistants, who give the students confidence to make accurate items in wood, plastic and food.

129. Students' attainment as observed in lessons in Key Stage 4 is below the national average in food, resistant materials and textiles, but there is clear evidence of improvement in the current Year 10. Some students studying graphics attain standards that are in line with the national average and are making good progress. The evidence from Year 11 coursework and from the predicted grades indicates that this year's results will be better than last year's. Furthermore, approximately a quarter of the year group is in line to gain a C grade or better in the year 2000. This indicates that students have made good progress over the past two years. Some higher band students have failed to submit completed coursework. This applies to all material areas, as a result of which their predicted grades reflect their underachievement. The students taking child development GCSE are predicted to gain a similar level to last year, which is slightly below the forecasted college grades. Half of the current Year 10 group has the potential to gain A* to C Grades. Several students within the group are beginning to grasp quite complex ideas how to prepare for their research study. Some students with special educational needs are making good progress in developing their practical skills but they have difficulty in developing their ideas on paper. In the past three years, students' results at GCSE have been well below the national average but in 1988 the results in graphics, resistant materials and textiles showed a higher number of A* to C grades than the college average. Results in 1999 were well below the national average in all material areas largely because some students failed to complete coursework which, in this subject, contributes 60 per cent of the overall grade. Students in Year 10 are beginning to develop their research skills more effectively. This was evident in food technology when planning diets for a range of dietary requirements. Students are able to use a wide range of equipment and machinery in food, textiles and resistant materials. All abilities have improved their competence in the practical aspects of the subject.

130. In the lessons observed, the quality of teaching was good or better in just over half, including nearly a quarter where it was very good. It was unsatisfactory in two of the 13 lessons observed. All the teachers have good subject knowledge but in the very good lessons, it is their interpretation and presentation of the contents of the lesson that enable students of all abilities to achieve good levels of understanding and produce a variety of accurate results. Planning in most lessons is thorough, especially in Year 9 graphics and in food technology, where good understanding is achieved by means of well-paced and well-planned activities. However, the teachers' planning does not as yet include sufficient coverage of current industrial practices. The use of information and communications technology is well integrated into the schemes of work, for example, control technology in Year 9. In good lessons teachers' expectations are high and the management of students is effective in getting all abilities to concentrate and be well motivated. When teaching is unsatisfactory, the teachers' management of and communication with students are poor and expectations are low. Teaching is good in child development. Most teachers mark work thoroughly and identify areas for improvement, but, as yet, the work is not geared to meet the needs of different levels of attainment, so as to stretch the creative talents of the higher band students. Classroom assistance for students with special educational needs is generally effective, though specific planned targets to monitor and improve their progress are set in only a few lessons. The department staff all assess work at the end of each module against common criteria and moderate across the department in order to reach the Key Stage 3 teacher assessment grades. However, under-achieving students do not receive sufficient guidance to improve their performance.

131. Most students enjoy the practical aspects of the subject and are keen to learn. Their concentration is nearly always good. Behaviour has improved considerably since the last inspection and students show respect for their teachers and all working areas. Only when students are not effectively managed or well motivated do they become mildly disruptive. A few students are sufficiently well motivated to work independently but many rely on teacher support and intervention, especially with developing their designing skills. Several Key Stage 4 students are unaware of how well they are progressing and do not have high enough expectations.

132. Since the previous inspection, a new head of department has been appointed and the management and structure of the department have improved in order to give a corporate image of the subject. All teachers have a specific role and the head of department, ably assisted by the second in department, has successfully begun to put systems in place to raise the results and the profile of the department. Students at both key stages experience a wide range of materials. The resistant materials area has been considerably improved in appearance and layout since the last inspection and the common policy for display has helped encourage students to strive to produce quality craft skills. There are very good displays within the food technology area. Major equipment, especially in resistant materials, is good but the units in food, especially, are in need of upgrading. The consumables allowance for the department is barely adequate and limits the potential creativity because of the inability to offer a wide range of material resources.

133. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 has improved considerably since the last inspection, especially in developing good basic skills. Students are beginning to apply their knowledge to practical work and higher band students' designing skills are improving steadily. Courses offered at Key Stage 4 are now more appropriate for the students. Higher quality products are evident in resistant materials, food and graphics but the range of experiences offered in textiles is still limited. A more focused approach to support special educational needs students has meant a greater improvement in the students' confidence and acquisition of skills. Behaviour has improved considerably especially when students are enthusiastic and well motivated.

134. In order to gain better GCSE results, the department needs to address the content of their schemes of work and get a better balance between learning and designing, which includes practices which are commonplace in industry. Such changes should be gradually introduced during the Key Stage 3 curriculum. Targets for improvement are already identified, but more rigorous monitoring of students who are under-achieving, especially those who are regularly absent, is required. Differentiation during lesson needs to be carefully planned and the sharing of good practices across the material areas would be of benefit to teachers and students.

GEOGRAPHY

135. Teaching and learning of geography are better than as reported in the last inspection. Overall, students starting in Year 7 achieve well below the expectations for their ages. By the end of Year 9, students improve their confidence and accuracy in using geographical knowledge, skills and understanding. Higher attaining students reach levels expected for students aged 14, whilst the majority are below, and sometimes well below, the national average. The same pattern of attainment continues through Key Stage 4. However, the latest GCSE results in 1999, which were well below national averages, do not reflect the improvement in teaching, learning and students' attainment which has taken place. The trend over the three years 1997-1999 shows a marked rise in GCSE performance from a very low base. The performance of boys and girls fluctuates over time: no trend is discernible.

136. Analysis of students' recent work shows that their achievement is improving. Students understand the physical processes that shape the landscape. They use their developing language skills to explain these changes. For example in Year 9, students record the unfolding drama of an eruption in 'a diary of a volcano'. Key Stage 4 students understand that the movement of the earth's outer layers is explained by the theory of plate tectonics. They apply their knowledge of the effects of earthquakes by writing a guide on 'How to survive an earthquake'. They analyse statistics of the magnitude of earthquakes and the number of deaths by recording the information on a scatter graph. In Year 11 students apply a range of knowledge and skills when undertaking individual investigations, such as coastal erosion between Whitstable and Reculver. Many students do not recall facts quickly enough, although they increasingly use subject terms accurately when giving answers. Students perform less well in examinations when required to apply knowledge and understanding to unfamiliar materials. This is a key area to improve. They are better at using given information to reach decisions. Higher attaining students write extensive answers in class and for homework. They analyse photographs to identify geographical features, and draw annotated sketches. They achieve well and make good progress, but they could do still better. Lower attaining students and those with special educational needs often read with difficulty and this restricts their understanding. Writing skills are not well developed, and spelling of common words is weak. Consequently this group of students makes only satisfactory progress because of these weaknesses in literacy. Continued improvement in their literacy skills will benefit achievement in geography.

137. The quality of teaching was good or better in seven of the ten lessons observed. In two lessons teaching was very good, and no teaching was less than satisfactory. Teachers

use their secure knowledge and understanding of geography and how students learn to plan their lessons thoroughly. They share lesson objectives with students at the start and check they are met at the end, so that students know what they have been expected to learn. Teachers give attention to developing students' literacy skills so that they become accurate in the use and spelling of subject vocabulary. They help students to sharpen their listening and observation skills to improve their learning. For example, students used a framework of questions to acquire information from a video on world trade. They showed amazement at the very low wages of the banana plantation workers of Ecuador, and reflected upon the precarious nature of reliance on a single product. Information and communications technology is appropriately used to improve learning in selected topics. In very good lessons class management appears effortless, for it is founded on high expectations of behaviour and effort. Students respond with very good concentration, motivation, and pride in the quality of their work. But they rely over much on their teachers for direction. Their skills of independent thinking and questioning are insufficiently developed. Practising such skills would lift the level of their achievement considerably. Students with special educational needs are sometimes frustrated by an inability to start a task because it is presented in a format that is too difficult. Occasionally teachers do not give support assistants enough guidance on the essential learning for individual students, and the approaches to be used. Teachers mark students' work regularly, but a comment such as 'good' need expansion. What makes the work 'good' and how could it be improved?

138. The department is well led. Teachers took positive actions in response to the last inspection and share commitment to raising standards. Much progress is evident in the quality of teaching and learning. The department is now settled in new rooms with adequate resources after the disruption and losses caused by fire in 1998. The head of geography uses the college's audit of practice to monitor teaching quality. This useful document needs to be used critically to improve standards further, for example, in the classroom provision for low attaining students and those with special educational needs.

HISTORY

139. History is taught very well and students' standards of work and progress are steadily improving.

140. Students' performance when they join the college is well below average but by end of Key Stage 3 they are achieving standards which, while still below, are much closer to national averages. This is shown both in the 1999 end of Key Stage 3 teacher assessments and in the work of students currently in Year 9 who demonstrate sound knowledge and understanding, and a growing confidence in the use of historical sources and other skills such as empathy, in their investigation of past events and societies. At Key Stage 4 the GCSE results in 1999 were very low in comparison with national averages but the work of students currently in Year 11 reflects higher standards especially in terms of their knowledge and understanding and detailed historical explanation of events, reasons and results. Much written work, however, remains descriptive than analytical in nature.

141. The improvement in standards is attributable to the high quality of the teaching. Teaching was at least good in all the lessons seen during the inspection and in nearly half it was very good.

142. Students, including those with special educational needs, are enabled to make good progress throughout the college because of the skilful use of the teachers' very good

subject expertise in planning, clear explanation, narrative and, very importantly, in arousing the students' interest in the subject. From Year 7 onwards they are encouraged to work as historians. The strong emphasis on the development of historical skills enables them to understand the nature of historical evidence and to use it critically in investigation. For instance, students in a Year 9 lesson distinguished effectively between primary and secondary sources in their study of native Americans. Similarly, students in Year 10 used sources effectively in considering complex issues relating to Home Rule in Ireland.

143. Students respond well to high levels of challenge. They concentrate well and work hard. Their interest is fostered and sustained by the good pace and range of work within lessons. Teaching methods are effective in ensuring that activities are interesting and learning is well sequenced and structured. Work is well matched to students' learning requirements ensuring that all, including those with special educational needs, have full access to the learning and make good progress. Learning is further promoted strongly by the good behaviour and relationships which characterise all lessons. Resources are used well, and imaginative and thoughtful use is made of display to provide prompts for learning and to encourage high levels of achievement.

144. Students are well informed about how well they are doing through the careful monitoring and recording of their progress. They are, however, not involved in setting their own targets for improvement.

145. The highly effective leadership and management of the history department have resulted in significant improvement in attainment at both key stages since the last inspection and the department has a good capacity for further improvement.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

146. Standards have risen at both key stages since the last inspection. The students benefit from having very good information and communications technology facilities throughout the college and are being taught by teachers who have competent information and communications technology skills.

147. On entry, students' skills in information and communications technology are broadly average. By the end of Key Stage 3, virtually all the students achieve standards which are again in line with the national average. Students with special educational needs make good progress, especially when assisted by classroom assistants. The 1999 end of Key Stage 3 teacher assessments indicated that over half the year group had reached level 5 or above. Girls did slightly better than boys at levels 5 and 6. The students have developed good skills and confidence in accessing hardware and software and using the Internet for research purposes. Use of control technology has been limited but the students currently experience control technology within design technology as well as in the discrete lessons.

148. The overall standards at Key Stage 4 are just in line with national averages, though in some lessons observed, the students' skills in using information and communications technology were below expectations. Students use information and communications

technology skills effectively in business education, especially when preparing case study material. Examination results for information studies in 1999 were above the college average for A* to C Grades but below the national average. Girls did better than boys. The predicted grades for information technology GCSE for 2000 are slightly above last year's results. Business studies predicted grades for 2000 are a great improvement on last year and it is anticipated that they will not be much below the national average. In 1999 boys did better than girls. The sixth form students taking GNVQ Intermediate business studies have successfully passed each module to date. In 1999 six students were successful in gaining a pass at the intermediate stage.

149. The basic skills in using word processing, desktop publishing, spreadsheets and databases have been taught effectively at Key Stage 3 and students are able to transfer these skills and use them, for example, in English to word process book reviews, in mathematics to develop skills in measuring and estimating, and in science, students use Excel to record sound levels. Students use the information and communications technology facilities regularly at lunch time and after school, often for research homework and for their own interest. At Key Stage 4, some students use information and communications technology competently to find and present information for their project work in a wide range of subjects.

150. Teaching in the lessons observed was satisfactory or better; it was good in just under half the lessons. A high percentage of teachers have developed competent skills to use subject-specific software with their students. Good teaching of basic skills in the discrete lessons leads to these being used effectively in all areas of the curriculum. Teachers' planning is thorough, though it does not always take account of the different needs of students. A few students who have very good prior skills are in need of further challenge. Marking of students' work is detailed, with supportive comments and areas for improvement identified. Occasionally, the marked work is not always shared or discussed with students. The management of students is generally good and support and encouragement are given when and where necessary. The discrete schemes of work are planned to cover all aspects of the Programmes of Study, including control work.

151. Most departments ensure a good delivery of information and communications technology. They also contribute greatly to the students' learning. For example, in English, students' use the Internet to find out about Shakespeare and use word processing and clipart to produce an account of his life. Computer-aided design and desktop publishing are used in art and design technology and in geography, spreadsheets and databases are used to record traffic surveys. Most departments have appropriate software with the exception of music. Modern foreign language teachers use the Internet on a regular basis for grammar manipulation but as yet not all classes receive the same experiences. In the special educational needs withdrawal lessons, good use is made of information and communications technology to help develop reading and spelling skills. Although all teachers use information and communications technology to assist students' learning, assessments of their skills against the National Curriculum criteria are not yet in place. Teaching in the sixth form is good, with good individual support and encouragement to enable individuals to understand some difficult concepts and to complete all the assessment criteria.

152. Good management by the head of department and the network manager ensures good access for all students. The head of department and her colleagues have established discrete courses at Key Stage 3 that successfully support the rest of the

curriculum. The courses offered at Key Stage 4 have resulted in all students receiving their full entitlement of information technology. The development of the new facilities since the fire has improved the overall access considerably. The reliability of equipment has given class teachers the confidence they needed to develop further skills within their departments. Assessment at Key Stage 3 is thorough and students' progress at Key Stage 4 is well monitored and documented, though, as yet, there is no clear strategy for improving the performance of borderline candidates at GCSE.

153. Improvements since the last inspection have been considerable. Staff confidence and capability have improved, especially in design and technology.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French and German

154. A new head of modern languages was appointed in September 1998. The staffing situation has since stabilised and the standards and attitudes of the students have improved.

155. Teacher assessment at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1998 and 1999 judged attainment in French at levels 4 and 5 to be on a par with national averages for all schools. On the evidence of work seen and lessons observed, however, current attainment near the end of the key stage lies below this, although in line with the students' ability.

156. GCSE results in French over the past three years reveal a fluctuating pattern. In 1999, from a year group of 106, only 15 students entered in French GCSE, of whom five gained grades A* to C. Both these figures were low, though a further 54 gained a pass in the Certificate of Achievement course. Current standards of attainment in Key Stage 4 indicate a gradual improvement from this very low base and the whole year group is now taking GCSE. The improvement is more substantial in Year 10, where over 30 students have opted to take both French and a newly introduced GCSE short course in German, in which good initial progress has been made.

157. In Key Stage 3, whilst progress overall is satisfactory, it differs for the various language skills and between individual classes. Standards are often better in writing but are not high enough in speaking. For example, most students, including many with special

educational needs, copy words and then sentences carefully and can, towards the end of the key stage, make use of a model sentence to produce similar accurate statements. High attainers are beginning by the end of the key stage to use past tenses, for example, in a short paragraph describing their holiday. In speaking, many students pronounce well when imitating the teacher but this potential is sometimes undermined when the written form of the words is introduced too soon. Most students learn during the key stage how to take part in a short dialogue, such as arranging to meet a friend, when they are helped by cues such as pictures; a few higher attainers adapt single words or short phrases in these dialogues in order to create their own versions. In one or two instances, especially in Year 9, average and low attainers are reluctant to speak French and this holds back standards. Although all three teachers use French in the classroom, it is still not used enough, for example, for everyday routines. This is affecting standards in both listening and speaking, since all students and especially those of average and lower attainment need to hear and repeat language phrases more intensively before they can use them with any confidence, for example, to carry out pair-work tasks. Some students with special educational needs do, however, make good progress in both listening and speaking. Many are eager volunteers orally and clearly enjoy the challenge of speaking French. In a Year 7 lesson on people's jobs, for example, the students met the high expectations of the teacher's carefully structured task by creating their own true or false statements.

158. In Key Stage 4 the introduction of a written coursework element is helping to raise standards in French at GCSE. A few higher attainers are coping well with higher-level tasks, writing at length and with reasonable fluency to describe, for example, their life at school. Average attainers, whilst much less accurate in their use of language, usually succeed in conveying their meaning. Students taking the German short course to GCSE have two lessons per week and this, combined with good quality teaching in which German is the normal means of communication, has led to good standards; clauses and the perfect tense have already been introduced and students are learning how to use these to enhance their writing.

159. Standards in French overall, and particularly in terms of listening and speaking, are affected by the erratic attendance of a significant minority of students.

160. The quality of teaching was at least satisfactory in 85 per cent of the lessons observed, and good or very good in nearly a third. It was unsatisfactory in two of the 13 lessons observed. The greatest variability was seen in the teaching of low attainers in Key Stage 3, which ranged from very good to unsatisfactory. Overall, however, in both key stages the quality of teaching was satisfactory. Teachers plan their work in detail, making good use of the helpful scheme of work to ensure that they cover the content of the National Curriculum and GCSE syllabus adequately. They do not, however, train students sufficiently in some listening and reading comprehension skills, for example, how to extract meaning from longer listening and reading passages. In some instances the planning caters for students of different ability, for example, by allowing higher attainers to practise a dialogue and then to adapt it. Similarly, in a Year 10 lesson the teacher made good use of the computer facilities to allow students to match appropriate questions and answers from two separate lists, and then to progress to a more open-ended task of personalising the answers. This promoted good learning.

161. Teachers are confident users of information technology, which is a growing feature of the work of the department. They always share the purpose of the lesson with their students and, at the end, try to make time to review how well this has been achieved. Most lessons have an appropriate balance of activities ranging over reading, writing, listening

and speaking. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, students are occasionally presented with an inaccurate model of language or are required to attempt tasks without linguistic preparation. Although many students try hard, the progress they then make in consolidating and reinforcing their knowledge is often limited. Teachers are well organised. They make frequent use of the overhead projector despite poor projection facilities. In the best practice, selected material was masked so that students had to recall language.

162. Relationships with students, especially with those who have special educational needs, are often very good. In a few Key Stage 3 classes some middle and low attainers are poorly motivated. When given an appropriate task such as listening for specific pieces of information on cassette, however, they apply themselves quite well and concentrate for short periods. The majority of students have positive attitudes to learning a language. They settle quickly, concentrate well and persevere at tasks, even when these are difficult. In all classes there are enthusiastic learners keen to try out their French. This is true also of many students with special educational needs, who respond well to the encouragement they are given. Students undertake pair-work sensibly in most classes. Once an initial task is completed, however, only a few, usually the higher attainers, have the confidence and initiative to move on to a more complex task.

163. In all lessons observed there were at least satisfactory standards of behaviour, and in most they were good or very good. In many classes, however, a significant number of absentees enabled more attention to be given to individual students, with positive effects upon attitudes and behaviour. The presence of a senior member of staff in one or two Key Stage 3 classes helped to monitor the behaviour of students, especially boys, and ensured reasonable levels of attentiveness and application.

164. The department has several important strengths. Despite a complete change of staff it has made sound progress on many of the issues raised in the last inspection. Leadership and management are good. The department is well organised, hard-working and caring of its students. A home-to-home exchange with a school in the twinned French town, successfully re-established this year, and a bright attractive teaching environment have contributed to the much more positive image for modern languages. Many students now like learning languages and standards are rising. The department is, however, not yet strong enough overall in terms of its experience and specialist expertise to raise standards significantly further, unless there is focused and specific professional development. In particular, a concerted effort to increase the amount of the foreign language heard and spoken is likely to have the greatest impact on standards.

MUSIC

165. Since the appointment of the head of department less than a year ago the music department has made rapid moves towards achieving its declared aims. It has had particular success in developing positive attitudes amongst students and raising their self-esteem.

166. Standards of attainment in music at Key Stage 3 are below national expectations. Because students arrive in Year 7 with only limited experience in music, and few play instruments, standards in performing are low. In composing in a rock and roll style and in improvising melodies over a ground bass only a small number of higher ability students had

sufficient keyboard fluency to be able to demonstrate their musical ideas. Although many have a good natural sense of rhythm and readily play well-known tunes by ear, they do not listen closely to their work to consider whether it makes musical sense and are unable to improve the effect. However, in all age groups throughout the key stage most students are making good progress in using sound imaginatively and sensitively to create atmospheric pieces. Audience listening skills are variable, but students enjoy hearing live performances and listened with admiration to their teachers' stylish jazz demonstrations on the piano. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress and one or two with good musical memories and sense of rhythm make very good progress in music.

167. At Key Stage 4, standards of attainment over recent years have remained below national averages, with no grades above D being awarded at GCSE. There is no music group in Year 11, but in Year 10, students are making good progress in composing. They work with a wide range of sound and are beginning to develop and extend their compositions, using texture and dynamics imaginatively. One student made very good use of sequencing and recording facilities to create some complex compositions. Success in more conventional styles of composing, and in performing, is limited because so few students have instrumental experience. Students are beginning to understand and apply a limited range of technical terms.

168. Attitudes towards music vary from good to unsatisfactory. Many students of average and lower ability have poor concentration and self-organisation, and do not know how to sustain independent effort for extended periods of time. Higher ability students listen well and work co-operatively but need more individual attention than is possible in large classes in order to develop their work. Students do not always listen closely to instructions or to each other's contributions to class discussions, and frequently interrupt one another. As a result, many good ideas and correct answers are lost.

169. The quality of teaching is consistently satisfactory within the department and has several good and very good features. Teachers are fully committed to realising the potential of every student, and the department's aims of increasing students' social skills as well as developing their musical knowledge and experience are evident in all lessons. Relationships are very good. However, lesson planning does not clearly identify what skills students need to develop in order to fulfil the requirements of tasks set, and the present structure of lessons does not give students the support they need to develop their ability to work independently. Because many students have short-term memories they need more immediate examples so that they have a model to follow. Students' work is assessed regularly, and the system is under review in anticipation of new guidelines. The department is well organised and plans for additional improvements are realistic. Computer technology is currently being installed and will be developed further. The present arrangement of rooms, while providing sufficient space for group work, creates difficulties for effective supervision and support.

170. Since the recent arrival of the head of department, extra-curricular work has flourished. About 12 students are taking instrumental lessons and are involved in small ensembles. A group of senior students has played in a number of local events and during the week of the inspection returned to college to rehearse for a local radio broadcast,

although officially those involved were on study leave. The college has made good contacts with the Whitstable Music Project and teachers from Kent Music School visit to give demonstration recitals. The department is planning an African drumming workshop in the near future. Good links with some local primary schools have also been established and after a successful joint concert, which included young musicians from the German twin town of Borken, further similar events are planned.

171. Although standards of attainment remain broadly the same as those prevalent during the previous inspection, the department is poised to improve in a variety of ways as a result of recent initiatives. There is a strong commitment both from the department's staff and the college's senior management to ensure that musical activities become a significant part of students' personal development. The introduction of instrumental tuition and the widening contact with local musicians and the community in general are providing a greatly enriched quality of experience for all students.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

172. When students arrive in Year 7, their standards of physical performance are generally below the national average for students of their age. By the end of Year 9, standards observed in lessons have reached a level which is in line with the national average, showing that the students have made good progress over the three years of Key Stage 3. This was demonstrated in a shot-putting lesson in Year 8, where a mixed group of boys and girls achieved improvement quickly. They were able to retain their new knowledge and skill as they tried to meet more difficult challenges. Groups of Year 9 students of middle and higher attainment made very rapid gains in long jumping techniques and basic tennis strokes, in advance of expectations at the end of Key Stage 3.

173. GCSE results in 1998 and 1997 in physical education, though below the average for all schools, matched the national average in terms of the proportion gaining grades A* to G. Results were lower in 1999. Standards in the present Year 11 are similar to those reached in 1997 and 1998. For example, students have produced satisfactory course work demonstrating understanding on theories of sprinting. In the present Year 10, course work shows expected development of detail and backgrounds in a variety of topics.

174. In Key Stage 4, students make satisfactory progress. For example, in a basketball lesson higher attaining boys were able to build up tactical skills and evaluate them for improved learning. As in Key Stage 3, activities seen involving older students showed no significant differences between boys and girls' learning. At least expected standards of practical work are seen in most lessons with those in extra-curricular activities being higher.

175. The quality of teaching in the lessons observed was satisfactory overall, with just over one half being good or very good. Teaching was also good in the extra-curricular activities.

176. Teachers plan lessons carefully both for the use of time and for the learning expected of students. This, together with the good relationships, which they establish with their students, ensures motivation to learn and succeed. Their management of students is very good, particularly in groups with a high proportion of students with special education

needs. A very good example of this was in a Year 7 softball catching and throwing lesson, which demonstrated the intense pace of learning in Key Stage 3. Skilful management of students ensures that they arrive promptly, change sensibly and behave well. Teachers assess students' progress well in lessons and over a period in units of study and course work, so enabling students to know how well things are going.

177. The subject is well led by a thoughtful head of department, working with colleagues who accept responsibility and manage students well. This creates a good atmosphere for learning. Teachers' expectations of good attitudes and of willing learning prompt students to seek success.

178. There are flaws in the quality of the accommodation. Poor maintenance of tennis courts on one occasion seriously affected the quality of students' learning. Showers in both girls' and boys' changing rooms do not work properly. There is no opportunity for showering after hard exercise. These two problem areas need co-ordinating into the otherwise satisfactory system of maintenance.

179. Since the last inspection, the department has maintained standards of teaching and of students' learning and attitudes. The curriculum at Key Stage 4 now offers sufficient time for the required teaching. However, in one specific area there has not been improvement. Almost all observed lessons had a significant proportion of students who were not taking part. Although in about half of lessons these students were given meaningful tasks, their learning was severely disadvantaged. This still requires attention.

180. In order to improve learning and attainment further, there is need for improved target setting for students. Although some exists already, for example, in circuit exercises, more concentration on agreeing targets and recording their outcomes would enable students to be clearer as to how to improve.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

181. Religious education continues to be a strength of the college. Standards at each key stage are below average but most students achieve well, because they are well taught and are interested, and the subject is led very well. The students' learning contributes significantly to their moral and social development. They learn tolerance and respect for each other and for people of other faiths and cultures.

182. Attainment at the age of 14 varies from slightly above average to low, overall below the average expectations of the Agreed Syllabus. In the upper band, students have good, detailed knowledge and understanding of religious practices and beliefs, for example, of Christian and Hindu views of life after death and of the differences between the idea of a God of judgement and a God of love. In the sample of work there were some examples of evaluations of good quality, for example, of how the Holocaust could be allowed to happen.

These students have a thoughtful approach supported by sound literacy skills. Most other students understand and use specific vocabulary of religious practices and beliefs and, orally, are confident offering a personal view on questions such as the idea of an after-life. Many, however, cannot approach average levels because they do not yet have the range of vocabulary or expression to be able to develop their written answers beyond the superficial. Nevertheless, students achieve well in relation to their starting-point in Year 7. For example, students with low reading ages in Year 7 were observed making good progress using their knowledge of names of key words in Hinduism and their understanding of how it is possible to believe in both a Creator and many gods. A Year 8 class with three-quarters of students with special educational needs made good progress using their knowledge of the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism to understand that life involves suffering and changes constantly.

183. The current Year 11 is the first year-group in the college to study the subject to GCSE level, and all are entered for the short-course examination. By the age of 16, overall standards are below average, but about a fifth of the year are rightly predicted to pass in the A* to C range. It was not possible to observe classes, but from the sample of students' work a number are clearly at this high level, writing confidently and in depth. For instance, they use their knowledge and understanding of teachings to justify a moral stance on euthanasia, or to explain how life's experience can challenge faith. Their writing is well structured with appropriate use of specialised vocabulary. Typically, below average students use the correct terminology and understand the main points of belief and of moral and social issues, but their answers are not so well argued and lack depth. Sometimes personal views are presented with insufficient factual basis. Nonetheless, all students are challenged suitably by a thought-provoking syllabus and most are on course to meet the realistic targets set. These targets are higher for the current Year 10 where proportionally more students are reaching average standards and above. Good progress was seen in the upper band where students used their understanding of the sacredness of life and belief in human equality to justify views on a fairer distribution of the world's resources. Similarly in the middle band in Year 10, below-average students showed good progress understanding how design in the natural world can be used to prove the existence of God.

184. In both key stages there is little difference between the achievements of boys and girls. As in the examples above, students with special needs make good progress in understanding. They are enabled through structured, directed questioning to know specific vocabulary and to understand details of religious practice. They understand basic principles of issues such as prejudice and discrimination. Their progress and achievement overall, however, are no better than satisfactory because they need more individual support in lessons to build on the progress they make in their separate literacy support groups.

185. Where, as in most cases, achievement is good, it is the result of good, and often very good, teaching. Of lessons seen, none was unsatisfactory, three-quarters were good or better and over a third were very good. Teachers are confident in their subject. They are particularly good at explaining difficult terms and concepts in simpler language. They set a challenging pace in their questioning, with constant references to key words and a good mixture of closed and open questions. As a result, a particular strength of students'

learning is their knowledge of fact and specific terms, which they consolidate well because teachers' review procedures are thorough. More open, searching questioning, moves thinking to a higher level. Teachers ask not simply What? but also What if..? and Why? Many students accept the challenge well. Planning is thorough and subject-matter is made interesting with a good use of resources and frequent reference to students' own experiences. Year 9 upper set students, for instance, were fascinated by Dante's idea of the Nine Pits of Hell and keen to discuss the meaning. Teachers' expectations are high, both of what students can achieve and of how they behave. Very good, sometimes excellent, management of behaviour ensures that students sustain concentration, work productively and behave well, often very well. Control of listening and speaking conditions is good. Where necessary, teachers train students to wait patiently for their turn to contribute to discussion. Good marking and some good use of structured support in written tasks help students to write accurately, but the development of evaluative skills is limited where students do not have the skill or vocabulary to write in depth or at length. More could be done to provide even more structured support for students whose greatest need is their writing.

186. Leadership is very good. It is very much to the credit of the new head of department that improvement since the last inspection has been so marked. Curriculum planning is now good, resources, in particular the bright and stimulating textbooks, are much improved and GCSE accreditation has been introduced for all. The consistently good teaching enables students to achieve well in relation to their other subjects. There is both a clear understanding of what still needs to be done and an undoubted capacity to achieve it. Importantly, the college does not provide a religious education element in the sixth form curriculum. The department has interesting, innovative ideas for correcting this omission.