

**Inspection under Section 28 of the
Education Act 2005**

A Report on the Quality of Education in

**Abertillery Comprehensive School
Alma Street,
Abertillery
NP13 1YL**

School Number: 6774074

Date of Inspection: 12-15 March 2007

by

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78673**

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Abertillery Comprehensive School was inspected as part of a national programme of school inspection. The purpose of inspection is to identify good features and shortcomings in schools in order that they may improve the quality of education offered and raise the standards achieved by their pupils. The inspection of all schools within a six-year cycle is also designed to give parents information about the performance of their child's school.

The inspection of Abertillery Comprehensive School took place between 12/03/07 and 15/03/07. An independent team of inspectors, led by Mr Peter Harris undertook the inspection. Estyn, a statutory body independent of, but funded by, the National Assembly for Wales, commissioned the inspection.

The team was required to report on the standards achieved by pupils, the quality of education provided by the school, the quality of leadership and management and the contribution made by the school to its pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The five-point scale used to represent all inspection judgements in this report is as follows:

Grade 1	good with outstanding features
Grade 2	good features and no important shortcomings
Grade 3	good features outweigh shortcomings
Grade 4	some good features, but shortcomings in important areas
Grade 5	many important shortcomings

There are three types of inspection.

For **all** inspections, there is a written report on seven key questions.

For **short** inspections, there are no subject reports.

For **standard** inspections, there are also reports on six subjects.

For **full** inspections, there are also reports on all subjects.

Estyn decides the kind of inspection that a school receives, mainly on the basis of its past performance. Most schools receive a standard inspection. All nursery schools, special schools, pupil referral units and any new or amalgamated schools receive a full inspection.

This school received a **standard** inspection.

Year groups and key stages

Schools use a common system of numbering year groups from the start of compulsory schooling to 18 years of age. This system emphasises the importance of continuity and eases communication among schools, governing bodies, parents and LEAs.

The term 'Reception' (R) refers to the year group of pupils in a primary school who reach the age of 5 during the academic year. Year 1 refers to the year group of pupils who reach the age of 6 during the academic year and so on. Year 13 is the year group of students who reach the age of 18 during the academic year.

Primary phase:

Year	R	Y 1	Y 2	Y 3	Y 4	Y 5	Y 6
Ages	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11

Secondary phase:

Year	Y 7	Y 8	Y 9	Y 10	Y 11	Y 12	Y 13
Ages	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18

The National Curriculum covers four key stages as follows:

Key stage 1	Year 1 and Year 2
Key stage 2	Year 3 to Year 6
Key stage 3	Year 7 to Year 9
Key stage 4	Year 10 and Year 11

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Context

The nature of the provider

1. Abertillery Comprehensive School is an English medium, mixed, 11-16 maintained school, located in the town of Abertillery, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. There are 900 pupils on roll. These figures show an increase from the time when the school was last inspected in March 2001, when there were 852 pupils on roll.
2. The majority of pupils comes from homes where English is the first language though recently five pupils have arrived from Poland. No pupils have Welsh as a first language.
3. There are seven associated primary schools, representing the villages of Llanhilleth, Aberbeeg, Soffryd and Cwmtillery as well as the town of Abertillery itself.
4. Twenty-two percent of pupils are entitled to free school meals, a figure above the national average of 16.6%, and a decrease since the last inspection, when 30% of pupils were entitled.
5. The attainment of pupils on entry is below the national average. Thirty-five per cent of pupils have special educational needs (SEN) which is above the national average. Of these 20% are on school action, nine percent on school action plus, and six per cent have statements. The school has a small number of identified gifted and talented pupils.
6. Vocational pathways are being formed with other providers in the area and the school works closely with the local further education colleges for students' education post-16.
7. The accommodation has been augmented through the recent completion of a leisure centre on the site.
8. Since the last inspection there has been a change of leadership. The headteacher took up her post in January 2002 and one deputy headteacher took up his post in September 2004. The two assistant headteachers took up their posts in September 2002. One deputy headteacher was in post at the time of the previous inspection.
9. The headteacher was absent from school for five months prior to the inspection.

The school's priorities and targets

10. The school's prospectus sets out seven aims, to:
 - develop an environment that innovates and stimulates;
 - ensure that all members of the school are valued regardless of intellectual ability, social background, gender, colour, or creed;
 - provide a well-ordered, well-structured and caring school community, where the opinions of all are heard;
 - provide a broad and balanced education, which will enable all pupils to develop and enjoy their lives after school;

- make pupils want to learn and gain recognised qualifications in all areas of activity;
 - ensure the school is a welcoming place that maintains active links with pupils' homes and the local community; and
 - expect pupils to see themselves positively, to be honest, self-disciplined and thoughtful of the rights and feelings of others.
11. The school's self-evaluation report is based on the seven key questions of the Common Inspection Framework.
12. Numerical targets are set, that in 2007:
- 45% of pupils should reach at least level 5 in all three subjects combined in national curriculum (NC) assessments at the end of key stage (KS) 3; and
 - 41% of pupils should achieve at least 5 grades A*-C, and 87% at least 5 grades A*-G in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examination.

Summary

13. Abertillery Comprehensive School has made good progress in raising the achievements of its pupils. The headteacher and her senior team have given a positive lead in seeking to improve the quality of teaching, which has resulted in considerable success.
14. Good progress has been made in all the key issues identified in the last inspection, in particular with regard to improving results in external tests and examinations, assessment recording and reporting procedures, and planning for improvement.

Table of grades awarded

Key Question	Inspection grade
1. How well do learners achieve?	2
2. How effective are teaching, training and assessment?	2
3. How well do the learning experiences meet the needs of learners and the wider community?	2
4. How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2
5. How effective are leadership and strategic management?	2
6. How well do leaders and managers evaluate and improve quality and standards?	2
7. How efficient are leaders and managers in using resources?	2

15. The grades for key questions 1-3 and 5-7 match those of the school in its self-evaluation report. While the school awarded itself grade 1 for key question 4 the inspection team disagreed because there was an insufficient number of outstanding features.

Standards achieved

16. In 2006 43% of pupils achieved level five and above in each of English, mathematics and science in the NC assessment at the end of KS3. Results in the

NC assessments at the end of KS3 were below national averages in 2006 for mathematics and science and for all three subjects combined.

17. Results for mathematics and science, and all three subjects combined, were below the average for similar schools. Results in English were in line with the national average and above the average for similar schools.
18. Actual attainment in English is higher than expected based on prior attainment. Actual attainment in mathematics and science was slightly less than expected.
19. At GCSE, the school enters slightly less pupils than the average for the unitary authority (UA) and Wales as a whole. While results in English and mathematics have improved since the last inspection, they remain below both local and national averages. Similarly, while results in science are in line with previous performance, they too remain below local and national averages.
20. When compared with schools of similar intake results in English and mathematics lie close to the median. Results for science, however, lie below the median.
21. Boys do not perform as well as girls at KS4.
22. The grades awarded for standards achieved in the six subjects inspected were as follows:

Subject	KS3	KS4
Welsh Second Language	2	2
Mathematics	3	2
Science	2	2
Geography	2	2
Art	1	1
Religious Education	2	2

23. At both key stages art has many good features, some of them outstanding.
24. In mathematics at KS4 and in science, geography, Welsh second language and religious education at both key stages there are good features and no important shortcomings.
25. In mathematics good features outweigh shortcomings at KS3.
26. In the 85 lessons observed in the six subjects the following grades were awarded:

Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
12%	58%	24%	6%	0%

27. These grades exceed the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) targets for 2007, that 65% of lessons should be graded 1 or 2 but fall short of the target that 98% should be graded 3 and above. These grades are 1% above the 11% of lessons judged to be Grade 1, and 4% above the 54% of lessons judged to be Grade 2 in the secondary schools inspected in 2005-2006.
28. Pupils have good communication and numeracy skills. Opportunities for developing Information Communications Technology (ICT) across the curriculum have improved since the last inspection. Pupils work well together and are aware of how to improve their performance. There are good opportunities for pupils to use incidental Welsh in class and throughout the school.
29. Pupils with SEN achieve well both in designated and mainstream classes at KS3 and in mainstream classes at KS4.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

30. The progress pupils make in their personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. Pupils have a good attitude to learning. They are sociable and are aware of the needs of others.
31. The consistency of pupils' good behaviour is a good feature and reflects well on the standards and examples conveyed by staff.
32. Pupils are well prepared for further education and employment.

The quality of education and training

33. The following grades were awarded for teaching in the 85 lessons observed in the six subjects, and in the 71 lessons in all other subjects.

Subjects	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
6 subjects	15%	51%	33%	1%	0%
Other subjects	22%	65%	13%	0%	0%
Total	17%	54%	28%	1%	0%

34. The 17% of lessons judged to have outstanding features equals the all-Wales figure for 2005-2006. The 1% of lessons judged to have had important shortcomings is less than the all Wales figure of five percent for the same period.
35. Seventy-one percent of lessons were graded 1 and 2, compared to 69% in all inspections in Wales 2005-2006. Ninety nine per cent of lessons were graded 3 and above which exceeds the all-Wales figure of 95% for the same period.
36. Whilst the size and nature of the sample are different from those of the last inspection, these figures are higher. At that time, 91% of lessons were graded 3 and above, compared to 99% now and 46% were graded 1 or 2, compared to 71% now.
37. The good features are the working relationship between teachers and pupils, the range of teaching methods, and the way in which teaching meets the language needs of learners.
38. The shortcomings are in the level of challenge in the work provided for pupils where there are variable practices in the way it is matched to their needs and abilities.
39. The monitoring and assessment of pupils' work is good. Teachers give written and verbal feedback of good quality. The use of self-assessment and peer-assessment is well developed.
40. The curriculum provided is broadly based and balanced. There are effective links with KS2. Pupils have a choice of modern foreign languages at KS3 and the opportunity to sit mathematics, Polish, art and statistics early at KS4.
41. The programme of study for personal and social education (PSE) links effectively with the schemes of work for careers education and guidance and work-related education. All pupils at KS4 follow a full course in Welsh as a second language.
42. The option system at KS4 limits the take-up for double science.
43. The support and guidance of pupils are well managed and to good effect. The school enjoys the confidence of parents and employers, and forms good links with outside agencies. Pupils who transfer from partner primary schools are well looked after and settle in well.

44. Pupils with additional learning needs feel secure and make outstanding progress.

Leadership and management

45. High expectations of staff and pupils feature prominently in the way in which the headteacher leads and manages the school. Her leadership is positive in this respect and she is ably supported by her deputy headteachers and assistant headteachers. There is a shared ownership of the values by all staff and they are reflected in the life of the school.
46. Welsh Assembly Government priorities are taken into account and the school works effectively with other providers.
47. The school has been able to make several new appointments at head of department level. Their leadership and management of their areas have a positive effect on standards.
48. Heads of year have clear job descriptions which focus on the support they give to pupils' academic development as well as their pastoral welfare. However they lack training in the use of data on pupils' performance and the time to work with departments in setting and monitoring targets for improvement.
49. The school's processes for self-evaluation are comprehensive. Priorities identified in the self-evaluation reports feature in the school's development plans.
50. Governors make an effective contribution to the leadership and management of the school. They are aware of the main challenges the school faces and its priorities in addressing them. Individual governors are linked with subject departments.
51. Governors are closely involved in strategic planning as well as in the monitoring of standards in departments. They act as good critical friends to the school.
52. The school uses its resources well. It has invested in ICT facilities and has improved the provision for ICT across the curriculum.
53. The quality of display in the classrooms and around the school is good and makes for a stimulating working environment for pupils and staff.
54. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. Performance management arrangements for teaching staff are in line with national requirements.
55. The school carries a prudent surplus in its budget which is well monitored at department and whole school level. The school provides good value for money.

Progress since the last inspection

56. With regard to the key issues of the previous inspection, the school has made good progress in:
- NC tests and teachers' assessments in KS3;
 - external examination results at GCSE;
 - the contents of its prospectus and its annual report to parents;
 - assessment, recording and reporting procedures;
 - the spiritual education of all pupils, including a daily act of collective worship for all pupils;
 - provision for *Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig*;

- standards and resourcing in ICT across the curriculum;
- boys' performance – though this still fluctuates; and
- attendance – though this is still below WAG targets.

57. The school has made outstanding progress in the standard of work in religious education.

Recommendations

In order to build on current achievement, the school should focus on the following priorities identified in the school development plan:

- R1. Continue to improve standards and examination results generally, and, in particular, improve:
- standards in mathematics and science at KS3;
 - standards in mathematics, science and English at KS4;
 - standards among pupils of middle to lower ability in mainstream classes; and
 - the achievement of boys.
- R2. Continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning, in particular by means of:
- planning for a greater match between the work provided and pupils' needs and abilities; and
 - developing the electronically-based data-handling system for assessment to allow classroom teachers to participate in the setting and monitoring of targets.
- R3. Review the curriculum provision in science at KS4 to increase the opportunities for pupils to participate in award-bearing courses.
- R4. Continue recent developments in the role of heads of year to enable them to become more effective leaders of learning.

The governing body is responsible for amending its current development plan to incorporate action in response to the recommendations within 45 working days of receiving this report, showing what the school is going to do about the recommendations. This plan, or a summary of it, will be circulated to all parents at the school.

Standards

Key Question 1: How well do learners achieve?

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

58. The grade awarded by the inspection team agrees with the grade awarded by the school in its self-evaluation report.

KS3 & KS4

Pupils' success in attaining agreed learning goals

59. Results in NC tests at KS3 have improved since the last inspection. In 2006, 43% of pupils reached at least Level 5 in all three subjects combined, compared to 58% nationally. These results represent a 6% increase over the previous two years and a 10% cent increase since the last inspection.
60. Results in all three of the core subjects have improved since the last inspection. Girls outperform boys in English, mathematics and science.
61. In comparison with schools of similar intake, results for 2006 are between the lower quartile and the median in all three of the core subjects combined. Results are in the lower quartile for mathematics and science. Results for English lie in the upper quartile, representing a significant improvement on previous years.
62. In 2006, at KS3, the school exceeded its targets for English. Targets for science and mathematics were not met. The school did not meet its target for passes in all three core subjects combined.
63. At KS4, 85% of pupils are entered for five or more GCSEs compared with 86% locally and 88% nationally. The 95% entered for one or more GCSE equals the local and national figure.
64. Thirty-seven percent of the 2006 cohort gained five or more grades A*-C in 2006 compared to 48% locally and 54% nationally. The 2006 pass rates at five or more grades A*-G were 82%, 84%, and 85% respectively. The average points score per pupil in 2006 was 32 compared with 37 locally and 41 nationally. These figures are in line with those when the school was last inspected.
65. Twenty-three percent of the 2006 cohort gained passes at grade C and above in each of English, mathematics and science compared with 33% locally and 40% nationally.
66. In comparison with schools of similar intake, results at KS4 in 2006 show that the percentage of pupils passing with five or more grades A*-C and above lie close to the median. Results for five or more grades A*-G and above lie close to the upper quartile.
67. While results in mathematics and English have improved since the last inspection, they remain below both local and national averages. Similarly, while results in science are in line with previous performance, they too remain below local and national averages.
68. In 2006, the percentage of pupils passing with grade C and above in English was 41% compared with 51% locally and 58% nationally. The percentage of pupils gaining grade C and above in mathematics was 35% compared with 42%

locally and 50% nationally. The figures for science were 29%, 44%, and 49% respectively.

69. When compared with schools of similar intake, results in English lie close to the median. Results in mathematics lie near the median. Results for science, however, lie below the median.
70. At KS4, the school neither met its target for all three core subjects combined, nor for English, mathematics, and science individually.
71. At both KS3 and KS4, there are good features in art, some of them outstanding. There are good features and no important shortcomings in mathematics, science, geography, Welsh second language, and religious education at KS4. Good features outweigh shortcomings in mathematics at KS3.
72. In the 85 lessons observed in the six subjects inspected, the following grades were awarded.

Key Stage	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
KS 3	10%	55%	22%	12%	0%
KS 4	14%	61%	25%	0%	0%
KS 3 & 4	12%	58%	24%	6%	0%

73. These grades exceed the WAG targets for 2007, that 65% of lessons should be graded 1 or 2 but fall short of the target that 98% should be graded 3 and above.
74. While the size and nature of the sample are different from those of the last inspection, these figures are a significant improvement on the 39% of lessons graded 2 and above at that time. The percentage of lessons graded 3 and above is 2% higher than six years ago.
75. On the whole pupils' communication skills have good features and no important shortcomings. Pupils are clear, fluent and confident speakers. They listen well both to teachers and to one another. Pupils develop good reading skills and write at an appropriate length when given the opportunity to do so.
76. Standards in numeracy have good features with no important shortcomings. Pupils apply numbers in a variety of contexts and formats.
77. Standards in ICT have improved since the last inspection. On the whole in Welsh second language, mathematics, science and geography there are good features which outweigh shortcomings. Standards of ICT in religious education are good with no important shortcomings. Pupils use word-processing and desktop-publishing programs to good effect and use the internet to undertake research. In art standards are good, with outstanding features.
78. Pupils work well together in pairs and in groups, in creative and problem-solving opportunities.
79. Bilingual skills have good features which outweigh shortcomings at both key stages. Skills are developed through lessons in Welsh second language. Pupils respond well to enthusiastic teaching which encourages them in the use of incidental Welsh in class and throughout the school. The percentage gaining a qualification in Welsh second language is in line with the local average but below the national average.

80. Pupils with SEN respond well to in-class support and make good progress . They are motivated to work hard and complete tasks. They are aware of the importance of key skills and exercise them at a level appropriate to their ability.

Their progress in learning

81. In science, geography, and religious education, pupils make good progress at both key stages. The progress that pupils make in art has good features, some of them outstanding. In mathematics, pupils make good progress though there are shortcomings at KS3. In Welsh second language pupils make good progress.
82. Pupils in KS4 benefit from learning support when it is available. However the progress of pupils of middle to lower ability in main stream classes is hindered where there is an insufficient match between the task set and their ability.
83. The most able pupils make good progress.
84. Pupils with support in English as an additional language make good progress.

The development of their personal, social and learning skills

85. Most pupils show good levels of motivation. They work hard in lessons, engaging with the task in hand. Across both key stages, pupils are courteous and polite, open and friendly.
86. Pupils are well behaved in and around the school, understanding what is expected of them and responding positively to the considerate and courteous way in which teachers and support staff relate to them.
87. Pupils' good behaviour makes an important contribution to the standards they achieve in their learning.
88. The overall attendance rate for the three terms in 2006 was 91%, slightly below the WAG target of 93%. On the whole, levels of punctuality at the school at the start of the day and the start of lessons are good.
89. The progress which pupils make in their personal, moral, social and cultural development is good. They respond positively to the expectations made of them by precept and example. Pupils are willing to listen, are confident to ask questions, and develop a wide understanding of moral and social issues.
90. The curriculum, assemblies, and collective worship contribute to pupils' spiritual development. Pupils show respect for the diversity of belief, attitude and tradition present both within the school itself and in society at large.
91. Pupils who take part in sport, in a range of clubs in subjects across the curriculum, and in visits, benefit from these experiences. Careers guidance and work-related education are of good quality and prepare pupils well for the world of work and give them positive attitudes towards independent and life-long learning.

The quality of education and training

Key Question 2: How effective are teaching, training and assessment?

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

92. The grade awarded by the inspection team agrees with the grade awarded by the school in its self-evaluation report.
93. Grades awarded for the quality of teaching in lessons observed in both key stages were:

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
6 subjects	15%	51%	33%	1%	0%
Other subjects	22%	65%	13%	0%	0%
Total	17%	54%	28%	1%	0%

94. The percentage of lessons judged to be good or better (71%) is significantly higher than that in the last inspection (46%) and is higher than the average recorded for all inspections in Wales in 2005/2006 (69%). The percentage of lessons with outstanding features is the same as that recorded for Wales (17%).
95. In the six subjects inspected the teaching of art at both key stages was good with outstanding features. Teaching was good with no important shortcomings in geography, science, Welsh second language and religious education at both key stages and in mathematics in KS4. In mathematics at KS3 good features outweigh shortcomings.
96. Lessons with outstanding features were observed in art, mathematics, science geography, Welsh second language, French, English and textiles.
97. An outstanding feature is the positive relationships between pupils and between teachers and pupils which are based on mutual respect. These help to create a supportive atmosphere which enhances the quality of teaching and learning. Praise is used to good effect, both in lessons and in commentaries appended to pupils' written work.
98. The quality of teaching and learning has many good features. Programmes of study are well planned and give detailed guidance to subject teams. In the majority of lessons, learning objectives are shared with pupils.
99. The pace of learning is generally good but is slower in some situations, where there is an over-dependence on copying from secondary sources.
100. A range of teaching strategies is used to good effect in most lessons. Pupils respond well when they work independently, in pairs and groups. In a significant minority of lessons, the quality of learning is affected by an over-dependence on didactic teaching and, in such situations, pupils are often passive and disengaged from learning. In a small number of KS4 lessons, progress is hindered by the disruptive behaviour of a small minority of pupils.
101. In most lessons, pupils respond well to the learning objectives set for them. However, in a high percentage of mixed-ability classes, the work is not adequately matched to meet the needs of all learners. In such situations, pupils of higher ability are not sufficiently challenged and those of lower ability find it

difficult to undertake and complete tasks and consequently fail to make optimum progress.

102. In most subjects, pupils have planned opportunities to practise their key skills, with particular attention to literacy. Pupils respond well and with confidence, in question and answer sessions, often giving relevant and extended answers to directed questions. Numeracy skills are well used in science and geography. There are examples of pupils making good use of ICT in art, science, Welsh second language and geography but, in many subjects, this aspect is not well developed in the teaching.
103. Teachers are well qualified and have a good subject knowledge which informs their teaching. School-based in-service training (INSET) reflects the priorities of the development plan and a wide range of relevant training has been organised using in-house and external providers. There is evidence of recent training objectives, such as the development of key skills and thinking skills, being incorporated into lesson plans and pupils' learning experiences. Newly-appointed and recently-qualified staff receive very good professional support as part of their induction to the school.
104. Good use is made of classroom resources, including textbooks. In many subjects, in particular in science, mathematics and geography, worksheets and booklets assist learning and these are generally of a good quality. Interactive whiteboards are used effectively by teachers in most subjects but there are few opportunities for pupils to make use of these aids as part of their learning and assessment.
105. Learning support assistants (LSAs) and teachers collaborate well and pupils with SEN receive effective support in mainstream classes. As a result, the standards achieved by pupils are generally good and individual educational plans (IEPs) are used to adapt classroom practice to meet pupils' needs.
106. An understanding of equal opportunities and issues of disability, race and gender are dealt with appropriately across the curriculum and in designated PSE lessons.
107. In addition to Welsh second language lessons, there are opportunities for pupils to exercise and develop their bilingual skills in class and around the school.
108. There is a homework policy and efforts are being made to engage pupils more actively in out-of-school learning. In some subjects, there is common practice and homework is planned, set regularly and assessed using agreed criteria. In a few subjects, the provision is inconsistent and the quality of homework varies widely.

The rigour of assessment and its use in planning and improving learning

109. There is a detailed, whole-school assessment policy and this provides a framework of strategies to guide practice in each subject department. Although there are some variations in practice between and even within subjects, the level of consistency in assessing pupils' work is good.
110. There is good practice in the collection of data for the school's database. At the point of transfer, cognitive ability tests and results from KS2 assessments are collated and used to identify pupils' levels of function in terms of NC levels. They are also used to set targets for improvement during KS3. Targets are subsequently modified using standardised data obtained from Fischer Family

Trust tests, which are also used with NC assessments at the end of KS3 to predict grade levels and set targets for KS4.

111. At present there are no opportunities for staff to input school-based assessment data into the system and to use these to set and modify targets. The existing software system is under-used and its capacity to receive and transpose teachers' assessment data into a variety of useful formats is not being exploited.
112. In most subjects, marking and assessment are accurate and written comments give advice on how to improve. In a few cases, marking is inconsistent and cursory and fails to identify errors. Consistency of practice across the school, is improved by the regular monitoring of marking by the senior management team.
113. A strength of the school is its commitment to positive assessment, pupils' self-evaluation and target-setting. The standards of pupils at KS4 are described in terms of grades and written comments advise how levels of attainment can be improved. Based on assessments and self-evaluation, targets are set for improvement. Pupils are aware of their current levels of attainment and know what they need to do to improve. This practice is present at KS3 but many pupils have a less secure awareness of their present standards, vis-à-vis NC levels. Good practice is evident in most subjects and in English it is outstanding.
114. Assessment for learning is well developed in English, French and art and many other subjects are making progress to incorporate this into their working practices.
115. A portfolio of assessed work in key skills is retained to provide guidance in assessing standards. A few subject departments are adopting this practice but it is not yet generally used across the curriculum.
116. Parents and carers receive a full annual report, which has a common format for all subjects. The full report has a number of good features, including detailed teacher comments which relate performance to NC levels or external examination grades, a pastoral report and a section for pupils to comment. In Y7, an interim report is provided at the end of the autumn term to indicate how a pupil has settled into the new school.
117. The school meets statutory requirements for assessment and fulfils the regulations of examination boards.

Key Question 3: How well do the learning experiences meet the needs and interests of learners and the wider community?

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

118. The grade awarded by the inspection team agrees with the grade awarded by the school in its self-evaluation report.

The extent to which learning experiences meet learners' needs and interests

119. The curriculum on the whole meets the needs of pupils and provides opportunity for accreditation. It is accessible to all pupils including those with SEN and those for whom English is an additional language.
120. The curriculum is broad and balanced at each key stage. It provides effective continuity and progression between years and across the key stages.

121. The curriculum at KS3 meets the requirements of the NC and religious education. Pupils at KS4 study the statutory core subjects in addition to a range of optional subjects. The curriculum meets legal and course requirements.
122. Good features at KS3 are the wide range of experiences offered in art and the opportunity to study drama and modern foreign languages.
123. Good features at KS4 are the opportunity for pupils in Y10 to gain a GCSE in mathematics, Polish, art and statistics.
124. There is a well-planned programme of assemblies. All year groups meet for collective worship where there are opportunities for prayer and reflection. Pupils play an active part in assemblies.
125. The programme of study in religious education makes very good provision for pupils to develop a good understanding of spirituality. The wider curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to develop a clear sense of moral values. The many opportunities to take part in fund-raising activities enable pupils to empathise with the needs of the poor in the developing world.
126. Pupils regularly participate in Eisteddfod competitions. All subjects contribute to Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig.
127. There is effective provision in place to ensure that pupils acquire basic and key skills. There are co-ordinators for literacy, numeracy and ICT who diligently audit and monitor delivery across the curriculum. There is a co-ordinator for the promotion of skills in problem-solving, improving one's own learning and working with others.
128. A good feature of the provision for key skills is that all pupils in Y8 and Y10 are able to achieve accreditation.
129. The extra-curricular programme is broad. Pupils are enthusiastic about the interesting range of activities that is provided, particularly in mathematics, music, dance and drama. There is a wide range of competitive sporting activities available for both boys and girls.
130. There is an active parent-teacher association, which is having a positive impact in supporting the school to meet its aims.
131. There are links of good quality with partner primary schools. Notable features are the curriculum packages devised to provide continuity in English, science and art, an enrichment programme for gifted and talented pupils in mathematics and the provision of Welsh second language tuition at KS2 by teachers of Abertillery Comprehensive School.
132. Other good features are the practical links to promote music and ICT, and the development of common assessment procedures.
133. The school also benefits from its partnership with teacher-training colleges.

The extent to which the learning experiences respond to the needs of employers and the wider community

134. The school works closely with local colleges and business support centres to offer a range of work-related courses leading to qualifications for pupils. Pupils are able to study office skills in school and in a specialist office suite at college. They are able to study a wide range of practical manufacturing units, child development and health and social care qualifications.

135. Pupils are provided with a well-considered careers guidance programme that includes good access to individual careers advisers and good access to guidance material both traditional and on-line. They are provided with opportunities to meet with employers and prepare and improve their curricula vitae.
136. All pupils in Y10 benefit from a two-week work-experience placement that is monitored for its effectiveness. Pupils are given opportunities to develop entrepreneurial skills through involvement in the Dynamo project and in business studies where pupils are given advice on setting up their own companies. This provides pupils with the opportunity to develop qualities of initiative and perseverance.
137. Throughout the school, there are regular displays of bilingual signage, and of work produced by pupils, that reflect pupils' knowledge of the Welsh language. Pupils are able to access the on-line careers service in Welsh. Pupils in KS3 regularly demonstrate their bilingual competence in registration periods and when making basic requests during lessons.
138. Projects about the environment and the community in geography, and topics in art and PSE raise pupils' awareness of education for sustainable development and global citizenship. Pupils respond, in thoughtful and compassionate ways, to their discoveries of global differences. They support projects to improve the environment, ameliorate poverty in the community and improve education in the developing world.
139. The school actively encourages pupils to engage in recycling activities. A healthy eating and healthy living programme has been recently introduced.
140. The promotion of key skills, thinking skills and the active participation in a range of community improvement initiatives are indicative of the school's response to the national priorities of lifelong learning and community regeneration.
141. However, there are shortcomings in the curricular provision. The option system at KS4 limits the take-up for double science. This results in the number of pupils taking double science being well below the national guidelines.

Key Question 4: How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

142. This grade is lower than the grade 1 awarded by the school in its self-evaluation report because there is an insufficient number of outstanding features.
143. The outstanding feature of the provision is the quality of provision for additional learning needs.

The quality of care, support and guidance for learners

144. The quality of care, support and guidance is a strength of the school. Heads of year, their deputies and form tutors work well together as a team.
145. Pastoral teams work closely with parents, carers and outside agencies to inform them of progress and enlist specialist support. However, communication between heads of year and tutors is largely on an informal basis.

146. All pupils are supported and advised on subject and career options. A clearly written booklet gives pupils and their parents information on all course requirements at the Y9 transition stage. It outlines the compact initiative with local employers. Pupils become involved in the target-setting and are mentored at KS4.
147. Careers Wales gives advice and a specialist careers adviser works with pupils with SEN at KS4.
148. Transition arrangements are much improved since the last inspection. Most departments have links with partner primary schools. The cross-curricular links, which include bridging packs in English, mathematics and science, give staff the opportunity to assess pupils' achievement. Taster days are held and some pupils with SEN visit the school on a more regular basis to help build confidence.
149. All pupils have one lesson of PSE a week taught by staff who have expressed an interest in this area of the curriculum. Pupils have an opportunity to listen to outside speakers, discuss with their peers and begin to form values in important areas of their development.
150. Attendance in the last academic year was 91%. The electronic registration in classrooms has improved the tracking of pupils at the start of the morning, afternoon and in between lessons. This, together with the recent appointment of a pastoral administrator, gives a much improved picture since the last inspection. The pastoral administrator oversees attendance, uniform, lateness and many routine tasks which allows heads of year to pursue other matters. Instant access to data on the monitor ensures that problems are dealt with quickly and parents informed when necessary.
151. The school has two child protection co-ordinators who are known to staff. There is a team of first-aiders and the office staff have systems in place for the administration of medication. The school encourages healthy eating.

The quality of provision for additional learning needs

152. There is outstanding provision for additional learning needs.
153. Staff are committed to ensuring that pupils with SEN realise their full potential.
154. Early identification, good use of a wide variety of outside agencies and a very flexible support ensures that pupils make good progress.
155. Year 11 pupils interviewed were highly motivated to succeed in their Entry level exams. They felt confident to move on to Ebbw Vale College at the end of the academic year. Each one spoke highly of the support that they were receiving.
156. The special needs code of practice is followed. All pupils with SEN are included in every aspect of school life. Pupils with mobility difficulties benefit from a purpose-built school. The recently-built leisure complex has meant that hydrotherapy sessions can take place on site.
157. Pupils whose behaviour impedes progress are equally very well supported. A resident OASIS worker, an outreach worker from the pupil referral unit, and links with Ebbw Vale College provide off-site education and give an exceptional range of support to pupils at risk of exclusion.

158. There are close links with the local special school. The educational psychologist shares her expertise in both schools. This benefits pupils.
159. Learning support assistants give a high level of sensitive support to individuals, small groups and classes. Because of this, pupils feel confident and progress is made.
160. However, in spite of this extremely positive picture there is one shortcoming.
161. Individual targets are not sufficiently shared with pupils. This limits pupils' understanding of what they need to do in order to improve their work.

The quality of provision for equal opportunities

162. Pupils interviewed felt that everyone in the school is given equal opportunities to succeed. There are strategies in place to deal with issues of poor behaviour and bullying. Pupils felt that staff dealt effectively when bullying was brought to their attention.
163. The "Buddies" system supports pupils on entry to the school. Pupils spoke highly of the scheme.
164. The school has done much to widen knowledge and understanding of other cultures.
165. The Sri Lanka project is an outstanding example of pupils and staff supporting a community in need. Some £27,000 was raised which allowed seventeen pupils and accompanying staff to travel to Sri Lanka, where they worked to improve a nursery school. There is a continuing relationship with the school and the experiences and feelings of pupils of the school in Sri Lanka are regularly fed back through assemblies and video-conferencing.
166. Multi-cultural festivals have involved the local community and many pupils from the school as well as partner primaries. Pupils have celebrated diversity through music, dance, food, drama and poetry.

Leadership and management

Key Question 5: How effective are leadership and strategic management?

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

167. The grade awarded by the inspection team agrees with the grade awarded by the school in its self-evaluation report.

How well leaders and managers provide clear direction and promote high standards

168. The headteacher has a clear focus on raising standards which has given rise to a number of initiatives that have contributed to the good progress made by the school. The school's aims are understood by staff and governors and have had a positive impact on standards.
169. She is well supported by a senior leadership team (SLT) whose strengths are underpinned by a commitment to the best interests of the pupils and a close knowledge of the community. They encourage members of staff to share a common purpose and help them reflect critically on their work.

170. Job descriptions for heads of department and heads of year are clear. However the effectiveness of heads of year is limited by the lack of time available to them. This limits their ability to track and analyse data on pupils' achievement and liaise with heads of department in setting and modifying targets as appropriate.
171. The school takes into account the WAG priorities. Social inclusion is a good feature of the school's provision. Pupils are motivated to remain committed to education to the age of 16. Vocationally-based courses are being developed and effective links have been made with providers of education and training in the community.
172. The PSE programme has been revised and is well planned. Healthy living and healthy eating are strong priorities. Transition arrangements have been strengthened, and pupils are well prepared for the next stage of education or employment, through good careers and work-related education.
173. Challenging targets have been set to help raise standards. While these have not always been met, they give clear signals about the rising expectations of the headteacher and SLT and results have been improving.
174. The arrangements set up to monitor the performance of individuals and teams are effective. Individuals and teams of staff have appropriate performance targets. They are well trained and supported as they work to meet them.
175. The arrangements for supporting the early professional development of teachers and the training and development of non-teaching staff are outstanding.

The extent to which governors meet their responsibilities

176. The governing body supports the headteacher and work of the school. Governors carry out their work through an appropriate range of committees as well as meeting regularly as a full governing body. Several governors have long experience in the role while others have been appointed recently.
177. Governors work well with the UA on priorities for the school's development. Governors are aware of their responsibility to monitor and review the quality of the school's provision. As a full governing body and through their various committees Governors receive regular reports from the headteacher that enable them to discuss her analyses of performance and the action the school proposes to take in response.
178. Individual governors are linked with particular departments to good effect. This enhances their capacity to influence the school's strategic direction.
179. The governing body fully meets regulatory and legal requirements.

Key Question 6: How well do leaders and managers evaluate and improve quality and standards?

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings.
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180. The grade awarded by the inspection team agrees with the grade awarded by the school in its self-evaluation report.

How effectively the provider's performance is monitored and evaluated

181. The full self-evaluation report is a comprehensive document and is an accurate reflection of the school and what it needs to do improve. Priorities identified in the self-evaluation reports feature in the development plan.
182. The school conducts a thorough self-evaluation of its performance by conducting departmental self-evaluation. Members of the leadership team help departments produce their self-evaluation report and check carefully the evidence on which departments base their judgements.
183. Departments use a common approach to self-evaluation and their reports contain honest appraisals of strengths and identify areas for further development.
184. Lesson observations are conducted by members of the SLT as part of the performance management programme for all teachers.
185. The school analyses its results effectively at KS3 and KS4 during the annual review of the examination performance.
186. Surveys conducted, by an independent agency, of parents' and pupils' opinions are also taken into account when the school evaluates its provision. Surveys have, for example, resulted in improvements such as the introduction of homework timetables.
187. Pupils are encouraged to self-evaluate their own work in subjects. Pupils have self-evaluation forms pasted into their exercise books which prompts reflection on their effort and attainment.
188. Information received from the school council is valued. Pupils contributed to the review of the school uniform and the introduction of healthy menus at the school cafeteria.
189. Governors are involved in the self-evaluation process when reports are taken to the governors for discussion, amending and approval.

The effectiveness of planning for improvement

190. Departmental development plans reflect the main findings of department self-evaluation reports. These plans contain appropriate and challenging targets and are effective tools for improvement.
191. Each governor is attached to a curricular area. A copy of the development plan goes to the governors for discussion, amendments and approval.
192. Self-evaluation and planning have been successful in producing the sustained improvement over the past few years. This can be seen in the outstanding progress the school has made in standards in religious education and the good progress that has been made in NC tests and teachers' assessments in KS3 and external examination results at GCSE.
193. Since the last inspection the school has also made good progress in reviewing its assessment, recording and reporting procedures, the provision for Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig and ICT across the curriculum, and the provision of a daily act of worship.
194. However, there are some shortcomings in self-evaluation and planning for improvement. The school has not evaluated the effectiveness of the role of

head of year and whole school initiatives such as assessment for learning have not been evaluated.

195. Some development plans have not been costed.

Key Question 7: How efficient are leaders and managers in using resources?

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

196. The grade awarded by the inspection team agrees with the grade awarded by the school in its self-evaluation report.

The adequacy, suitability and use made of staffing, learning resources and accommodation

197. There are sufficient, qualified, specialist teachers, who are supported in their work by a significant number of teaching assistants and administrative staff. They all make a good contribution to the advancement of pupils' learning and development. The vast majority of teachers have their own rooms and teach their own subject.
198. Expenditure on staffing is higher than average and the overall staff contact ratio is low at 75% but there are plans to re-assess the position for the next academic year.
199. The curriculum is generally well thought out at both key stages and is broad and balanced. Pupils in Y10/11 benefit from vocational opportunities in manufacturing and office skills.
200. Capitation levels ensure that across the school there are good learning resources available in most subjects other than in Welsh second language and mathematics. There has been a substantial improvement in the number of computers, ICT suites and interactive whiteboards.
201. Good progress has been made with the development of the library. Books are attractively displayed by the librarian and there is an appropriate range of fiction/non-fiction material together with a range of magazines, periodical and newspapers. In recent times, a reference section has been created and there are four computers networked with internet access. The library is staffed full-time and is open to pupils before and after school as well as during the lunch time. Pupils are encouraged to assist the librarian with cataloguing and other duties. The location of the school's main photocopying service within the library detracts from the ambience of the room.
202. Staff and pupils benefit from accommodation that is of good quality and well maintained. All subjects are taught in suited areas with good specialist facilities. There is a quiet atmosphere pervading the school which is the result of extensive carpeted areas. Classroom and corridor displays support the pleasant learning atmosphere.
203. For those with a disability, there is very good access throughout the building and appropriate facilities.
204. The school benefits from an extensive provision of leisure, sporting and community facilities.

How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money

205. The budget is carefully set, tracked and evaluated and school finances are very well managed. The headteacher and the governors, through the finance committee, are regularly appraised of the progress with finances. Financial audit reports' recommendations are acted upon effectively. There is efficient sharing of resources with the adult community centre based at the school.
206. Workforce reform and remodelling have been successfully introduced along with the provision of planning, preparation and assessment time. Cover supervisors and learning support assistants are well utilised in the process.
207. The importance placed upon continuing professional development and the performance management arrangements for all staff is an outstanding feature. Both teachers and non-teachers benefited from positive encouragement, in-house training, coaching and mentoring. Newly-qualified teachers and those needing early professional development are carefully mentored and supported.
208. The use of the budget reflects the priorities of the school development plan and the school gives good value for money.

Standards achieved in subjects and areas of learning

Welsh second language

Key Stage 3: Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

Key Stage 4: Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

KS3

Good features

209. Most pupils speak with appropriate pronunciation and intonation. The most able pupils respond with confidence in whole-class and small-group situations and extend their answers when encouraged.
210. Many pupils of all abilities have good recall of work learnt in previous lessons. With encouragement, many express opinions and give reasons for their views using topic-specific vocabulary.
211. Pupils listen purposefully to one another and have a good understanding of the Welsh spoken by the teacher in familiar contexts.
212. Most pupils are able to select relevant information from a limited range of listening and reading texts, usually in closed or very structured tasks.
213. Written work is usually completed to a good standard and neatly presented. Some pupils produce more extended written work with a good level of accuracy, making good use of reference materials available to them.
214. Pupils use ICT effectively to word-process their work.
215. Pupils with SEN make good progress over the key stage.

Shortcomings

216. Listening skills are underdeveloped. Pupils cope only with listening to familiar voices and reading related to classroom exercises. They do not read independently and for pleasure.
217. Generally pupils make little spontaneous use of Welsh in normal classroom situations.

KS4

Good features

218. Most pupils speak confidently in a range of situations. They pronounce words clearly and accurately with appropriate intonation.
219. More able pupils have a good range of sentence patterns at their disposal. They expand upon their answers to give well-thought-out reasons when expressing opinions and often take part in more complex dialogues, sustaining a discussion of several exchanges. They vary tenses with ease.
220. Pupils listen purposefully to one another and have a good understanding of the Welsh spoken by the teacher in classroom situations.
221. Most pupils are able to select relevant information from a limited range of listening and reading texts, usually geared towards the requirements of the GCSE examination.
222. Written work is usually completed to a good standard and neatly presented. Higher-tier pupils produce more extended written work with a good level of language accuracy. Lower-tier pupils produce written work commensurate with their ability.
223. More able pupils transfer language from one context to another and use a variety of strategies to vary sentence patterns and extend their oral and written contributions.
224. Pupils use ICT effectively to word-process their work.

Shortcomings

225. At KS 4, GCSE results are below the national average though in line with the local average.
226. Some students have only partial understanding of the language they hear and can only generate straight-forward sentences and answers using basic vocabulary.
227. Many pupils do not take part in independent reading and reading for pleasure.

Mathematics

Key Stage 3 - Grade 3: Good features outweigh shortcomings

Key Stage 4 - Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcoming

KS3

Good features

228. Many pupils in all years of KS3 are making sound progress over time in mathematics.

229. Able pupils have good mental number skills. They work with understanding and accuracy when calculating with integers and simple fractions.
230. Good progress is made by many pupils in individual lessons. For example, in investigating how changes in the shape of rectangles affect area and perimeter, Y7 pupils show good investigative skills and a good understanding of both these concepts. Lower ability Y8 pupils demonstrate good standards when they use ICT to construct and interpret line graphs from data about car journeys. In Y9, many able pupils are confident in the use of Pythagoras' Theorem and some can recognise Pythagorean triples.
231. Pupils with SEN achieve good standards. They are making good progress in an appropriate range of mathematical topics.

Shortcomings

232. The written work of a minority of pupils is often incomplete and untidily presented.
233. In many classes, especially those where the range of pupils' ability is wide, the work of weaker pupils is often of a lower standard than it could be.
234. Pupils of average ability have poor mental number skills. Their mental strategies for working with numbers up to 100 are not secure. Many of these pupils do not appreciate the links between multiplication, division and fractions of numbers. They have a weak understanding of the equivalence between fractions and decimals.

KS4

Good features

235. Most pupils at KS4 make good progress over time. Good progress is made in individual lessons where, for example, able Y11 pupils are confident in the use of the sine and cosine rules, and less-able Y10 pupils understand the relationships between fractions, decimals and percentages.
236. Able pupils have good mental number skills and written computational skills. They apply their skills confidently in a variety of situations.
237. The written work of less-able pupils is of a good standard. The consistency of good standards amongst these pupils is a strength and a significant improvement compared to KS3. They present their work to a good standard.
238. Pupils with SEN continue to achieve good standards in line with their ability and they achieve appropriate accreditation in mathematics at the end of Y11.
239. Many pupils across the ability range achieve good standards in their GCSE coursework. In the best work, pupils explore hypotheses and draw conclusions from their investigations.
240. For the last two years, after having taken GCSE Mathematics in Y10, many of the ablest pupils have taken GCSE Statistics in Y11. Almost without exception, pupils in 2006 succeeded in achieving grade C or above s in statistics.

Shortcomings

241. The standard of written presentation of the work of a small minority of pupils is too low.

242. The early entry for GCSE Mathematics in Y10 resulted in some pupils achieving grades lower than they might have achieved if entered in Y11.

Science

Key Stage 3: Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

Key Stage 4: Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

KS3

Good features

- 243. Pupils have confident and secure recall and can describe aspects of life processes, materials and their properties and physical processes.
- 244. Pupils are good and, in some cases, very good at applying previously learnt knowledge to new situations. They also make links with the applications of science to society in a very positive way, particularly with respect to environmental issues.
- 245. Pupils know key scientific words and use them to very good effect.
- 246. They carry out practical work carefully and sensibly, paying good attention to health and safety.
- 247. They use apparatus, observe and measure accurately. They record data in tables and use them to plot graphs.
- 248. They can analyse data, solve problems and plan scientific investigations.
- 249. They make good use of texts and other written resources in order to gain information and, in some cases, their extended written work is very good.

Shortcomings

- 250. In most classes, a small number of pupils do not make progress at a rate appropriate to their age and ability.

KS4

Good features

- 251. Pupils have confident, secure recall of knowledge and good understanding of aspects of biology, chemistry and physics. The more able pupils can explain, both orally and in writing, complex and abstract scientific concepts.
- 252. Pupils are good and, in some cases, very good at applying previously learnt knowledge to support the learning of new facts and ideas.
- 253. They use scientific terminology appropriately, both orally and in writing, and in particular, use the terms required for the 'How Science Works' aspect of the new GCSE specifications.
- 254. Pupils know that science contributes to society in a wide variety of contexts and have an awareness of its impact on industry and the environment.
- 255. They can construct tables for recording data, and use these data to present line graphs and draw conclusions. Many pupils understand the concept of reliability when collecting results.

256. They make good progress in developing the scientific skills required for the assessment tasks for the new GCSE specifications. They evaluate the quality of their results as well as the quality of their own performance.

Shortcomings

257. In almost all classes, a small minority of pupils, of all abilities, do not make progress at a rate appropriate to the requirements of the GCSE specifications.

258. In some classes, a small minority of pupils have poor manipulative skills and make inaccurate observations and measurements.

Geography

Key Stage 3: Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

Key Stage 4: Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

KS3

Good features

259. Most pupils are confident in using, making and analysing a range of maps, graphs, photographic images and questionnaires in appropriate settings.

260. Pupils' application of prior knowledge and use of geographical vocabulary and terminology are particularly strong, when investigating a range of physical and human processes. These include the formation of features associated with fluvial, coastal and volcanic landscapes, weathering and a variety of climatic regions.

261. Pupils gain a secure understanding of sustainable development and global citizenship through studying issues relating to the impact of local flooding and water pollution, and the deforestation of the Equatorial rain forests. They respond well to the opportunity to evaluate the environmental, social and economic interdependence between less and more economically developed countries.

262. The large majority of pupils can describe and explain broad patterns of distribution of physical and human phenomena. They have a good understanding of plate tectonics and related landforms. They are able to describe the key characteristics of Wales, and the major world ecosystems.

263. Pupils with SEN make particularly good progress. They develop and apply their skills and understanding to an appropriate range of topics and achieve good standards.

Shortcomings

264. ICT and fieldwork enquiry skills are insufficiently developed through the key stage.

KS4

Good features

265. There has been a sustained improvement in pupils' performance at GCSE over the last three years from 32% to 48% of pupils gaining grades A*-C.

266. Most pupils use their geographical skills effectively when undertaking their fieldwork assignments on the characteristics of contrasting retail centres and the

features of the local river system. In the majority of cases, they use a range of ICT and graphical skills to investigate and present enquiries of good quality.

267. Pupils have a good level of understanding of key geographical vocabulary, which they use confidently when communicating information.
268. Pupils have a secure knowledge of case studies which they use appropriately when exemplifying their understanding of renewable energy, global warming, and population growth.
269. The large majority of pupils can describe and explain the distribution and formation of features resulting from physical and human processes such as glacial landscapes, weather phenomena, rural and urban change, and industrial activity.

Shortcomings

270. The off task behaviour of a small minority of pupils has a detrimental effect on the standards of their work.
271. A small minority of pupils presents poor quality coursework.

Art

Key Stage 3: Grade 1: Good with outstanding features

Key Stage 4: Grade 1: Good with outstanding features

KS3

Outstanding features

- The performance of pupils with SEN, and
- The achievement of pupils in mosaic art and large-scale murals

Good features

272. Pupils make rapid progress in all elements of study, and by the end of Y9 they consistently perform significantly above the expected national level.
273. Pupils with SEN perform above the average.
274. Pupils show that they understand how to use the essential elements of line, tone, pattern, shape, form and space with growing skill. They exploit successfully these elements in their own work, frequently using colour and texture with great verve.
275. When drawing, they know how to look and record with growing accuracy. When looking at art, they are able to describe what they see, using an appropriate art vocabulary. When researching art, they are able to gather material and make use of books and the internet to inform their knowledge and understanding.
276. They are aware of the visual culture of Wales through study of traditional Celtic pattern forms. They have a knowledge and an appreciation of the art of other cultures. They develop new craft skills and an awareness of the role of contemporary artists by working with visiting Welsh artists, designers, printmakers and craftworkers. Their participation and achievements in mosaic art, in both the 'Lady of Abertillery' and the large-scale underpass murals is outstanding.

Shortcomings

277. There are no significant shortcomings.

KS4

Outstanding features

- The performance of pupils with SEN;
- The performance of gifted and talented pupils;
- The standard of pupils' sketchbooks, and
- Their achievement as designers and artists.

Good Features

278. Both boys and girls consistently achieve above the national average at the higher grades. Pupils with SEN regularly gain the higher grades.
279. Gifted and talented pupils gain higher grade results when entered for the GCSE examination in Y10. Pupils have an exceptional record as national prize-winners in design and photography. These are outstanding achievements.
280. Pupils develop as independent artists. The development of their creative ideas in their sketchbooks is outstanding. They are able to select and exploit imaginatively a wide range of material. They express their ideas with flair in a wide range of both two-dimensional and three-dimensional media.
281. In their writing they are accustomed to discussing art in a purposeful manner. They have a growing awareness of both traditional and contemporary art from visiting national and international art galleries.
282. Pupils' outstanding achievement, both as designers and artists, is evidenced by their participation in school based and community projects.

Shortcomings

283. There are no significant shortcomings.

Religious Education (including Religious Studies)
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Key Stage 3: Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

Key Stage 4: Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

KS3

Good features

284. Most pupils have a good recall of details of major features of the different religions they study.
285. They use appropriate religious vocabulary effectively in oral and written contexts.
286. Many recognise the significance of religious traditions and practices, such as the wearing of particular forms of dress, for example the hijab by Muslim women.
287. Around half demonstrate, through pertinent examples, some of the effects of religious attitudes and practices on wider society.

288. A few pupils put forward well-considered opinions on life and religion, offering reasons for their own views and, in a small number of cases, responding well to challenges.

Shortcomings

289. A small minority of pupils do not link clearly religious standpoints and the actions people take, unless they are specifically drawn out by their teachers' questioning.

290. Many pupils' personal opinions about ultimate questions of life and belief are not well developed.

KS4

Good features

291. Most pupils have a good understanding of some of the major beliefs and practices of those religions prominent in Britain today.

292. Many use relevant examples from history of the implications and consequences of faith when important moral choices have to be made.

293. Most pupils use religious terminology appropriately.

294. Pupils with SEN reflect carefully on the issues they study, exploring their attitudes and emotions well and usually giving a reason to support a viewpoint.

295. In Y10, most pupils identify a range of influences on their own views and those of others.

296. In the full course GCSE, taken at present by about a quarter of all pupils in Y10 only, a large majority is prepared to question their own preconceptions in the light of evidence.

297. In Y11, most pupils offer relevant evidence to support their arguments, showing, for example, the outcome of applying Christian principles to contemporary issues, to evaluate the legitimacy of war.

Shortcomings

298. In Y10, a small minority draws on a narrow range of perspectives and influences to support their arguments and the development of their own opinions.

299. In the full course GCSE a few pupils have difficulty in looking objectively at alternative standpoints.

300. In Y11, a small minority of pupils does not fully recognise the complexity of some issues, so is limited in weighing-up opinions, to come to a reasoned judgement.

School's response to the inspection

The inspection report closely matches the school's self evaluation in 6 out of 7 key questions, and recognises the progress we have made in all areas since the last inspection. In particular it is pleasing that the improvements in teaching and learning have resulted in our matching the all-Wales figure for the percentage of lessons judged to have outstanding features and only 1% of lessons having important shortcomings against the 5% average for Wales. At the same time, the good working relationships between teachers and pupils remain. The consistency of pupils' good behaviour is also recognised as a strength as is the good preparation for further education and employment, which are very important to improve their life chances in this location.

We are content with the recommendations to continue to improve standards and examination results generally and continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and will work towards increased differentiation in lessons as an important priority in our action plan. We expect that the new appointments at curriculum leader level will have a continuing positive effect in maths and science and that the improvement already seen in KS3 English will extend into KS4.

We will also be developing the use of assessment manager data handling system so teachers use it for recording, and heads of year (learning managers) are trained in the analysis of data to monitor progress and use appropriate intervention strategies. The options system will be reviewed before the next round of choices are made so the position of science is reconsidered.

The action plan focussing on the above priorities will constitute the development plan for the next academic year, and form the basis of the plan for the following year. We will expect to show considerable progress during that time.

Appendix 1

Basic information about the school

Name of school	Abertillery Comprehensive School
School type	Secondary
Age range of pupils	11-16
Address of school	Alma Street Abertillery
Postcode	NP13 1YL
Telephone number	01495-217121
Headteacher	Mrs Pauline Thomas
Date of appointment	01.01.2002
Chair of governors / Appropriate authority	Cllr Gill Clark
Reporting inspector	Mr Peter Harris
Dates of inspection	12/03/07-15/03/07

Appendix 2

School data and indicators

Year group	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13	Total
Number of pupils	156	180	177	205	182	-	-	900

Total number of teachers			
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time equivalent (fte)
Number of teachers	58	1	59

Staffing information	
Pupil: teacher (fte) ratio (excluding special classes)	15.25:1
Pupil: adult (fte) ratio in special classes	
Average teaching group size	20.5
Overall contact ratio (percentage)	74.24%

Percentage attendance for three complete terms prior to the inspection								
	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13	Whole school
Term 1	92.8	91.9	89.9	89.8	90.6	-	-	91
Term 2	92.5	91.8	91.7	91	90.8	-	-	91.4
Term 3	93.8	92.6	91.8	91.3	92.1	-	-	92.3

Percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals	22
Number of pupils excluded during 12 months prior to inspection	20

Appendix 3

National Curriculum Assessment Results End of key stage 3:

National Curriculum Assessment KS3 results 2006															
Total number of pupils in Y9:174															
Percentage of pupils at each level															
			D	A	F	W	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	EP
English	Teacher assessment	School	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	27	42	24	1	0	
		National	0	1	1	0	0	2	8	21	35	24	8	0	
Mathematics	Teacher assessment	School	0	0	0	0	1	0	5	35	27	27	5	0	
		National	0	5	1	0	0	1	6	18	24	32	15	0	
Science	Teacher assessment	School	0	0	0	0	0	1	8	31	46	12	2	0	
		National	0	1	1	0	0	0	6	19	33	27	12	0	

- D Pupils excepted under statutory arrangements from part of the National Curriculum
 A Pupils who have failed to register a level because of absence
 F Pupils who have failed to register a level for reasons other than absence
 W Pupils who are working towards level 1
 EP Exceptional Performance, where pupils at key stage 3 perform above level 8

Percentage of pupils attaining at least level 5 in mathematics, science and either English or Welsh (first language) by teacher assessment			
In the school	43	In Wales	58

Public Examination Results:

For pupils aged 15, results in GCSE, Entry Level Qualification, GNVQ and NVQ	
Number of pupils aged 15 on the school roll in January 2006	200
Average GCSE or GNVQ points score per pupil	32

The percentage of 15 year old pupils who in 2006:	School	UA	Wales
entered for 5 or more GCSEs or equivalent	85	86	88
attained at least 5 GCSE grades A* to C, the equivalent vocational qualifications or a combination of both	37	48	54
attained at least 5 GCSE grades A* to G, the equivalent vocational qualifications or a combination of both	82	84	86
attained GCSE grades A*-C in each of mathematics, science, English or Welsh first language (the core subject indicator)	23	33	40
entered at least one Entry level qualification, GCSE short course or GCSE	99	98	98
attained one or more GCSE grades A*-C or the vocational qualification equivalent	70	74	77
attained one or more GCSE grades A*-G or the vocational qualification equivalent	92	91	93
attained no graded GCSE or the vocational qualification equivalent	8	9	7
attained one or more Entry level qualification only	6	4	3
attained a GNVQ Part 1, a GNVQ at Foundation level or NVQ level 1	-		
attained a GNVQ Part 1, a GNVQ at Intermediate level or NVQ level 2	-		

Appendix 4

Evidence base of the inspection

Inspectors spent a total of 38 days in the school and were joined by the school's deputy headteacher as nominee. They held a meeting before the inspection.

During the inspection, inspectors visited:

- 156 lessons, 85 lessons in the six subjects inspected and 71 lessons in all other subjects;
- registrations and assemblies; and
- some extra-curricular activities.

Members of the inspection team met with:

- staff, parents and governors before the inspection;
- senior managers, middle managers, teachers, support assistants and administrative staff;
- groups of pupils representing each year group; and
- representatives of the school council.

The team also considered:

- the school's self-evaluation report;
- replies to the parents' questionnaire;
- comprehensive documentation provided by the school before and during the inspection;
- samples of pupils' reports; and,
- a range of pupils' work.

After the inspection, inspectors held meetings with departments, senior managers and governors.

Appendix 5

Composition and responsibilities of the inspection team

Team member	Responsibilities
Mr Peter Harris	Rgl: Context, Summary, Recommendations, KQ1, KQ5, Appendix
Dr Alan Evans	KQ2 & contribution to science
Mr Eric Foster	KQ3
Mrs Ann Norbury	KQ4 & SEN
Mr John Hughes	KQ6 and contribution to science
Mr Gwynoro Jones	KQ7 and Lay inspector
Mr Mike Heylings	Mathematics
Mrs Delyth Williams	Science
Miss Bethan Clement	Welsh second language
Mr Andrew Herdman	Geography
Mr Martyn Williams	Religious education
Mr Peter Evans	Nominee

Acknowledgement

The inspection team would like to thank the governors, the headteacher staff and pupils for their co-operation and courtesy during the inspection.

The contractor was:
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