

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

**A Report on the Quality of Education in**

**Afon Taf High School  
Yew Street  
Troedyrhiw  
Merthyr Tydfil  
CF48 4ED**

**School Number: 6754011**

**Date of Inspection: 28/01/08**

**by**

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Afon Taf High 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 Afon Taf High School took place between 28/01/08 and 31/01/08. An independent team of inspectors, led by Terence Andrew O'Marah 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:

<b>Grade 1</b>	good with outstanding features
<b>Grade 2</b>	good features and no important shortcomings
<b>Grade 3</b>	good features outweigh shortcomings
<b>Grade 4</b>	some good features, but shortcomings in important areas
<b>Grade 5</b>	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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## A glossary of terms used in this report

<b>achievement</b>	Inspectors judge achievement by how well learners are doing in relation to their ability and by the progress they make. (See also attainment.)
<b>additional learning needs (ALN)</b>	This term covers a very wide range of needs. It includes learners who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• have special educational needs (SEN);</li><li>• are disabled;</li><li>• have medical needs;</li><li>• have emotional, social and behavioural difficulties;</li></ul> are more able and talented than most of their classmates; and are learning English as an additional language.
<b>attainment</b>	How well learners are doing as measured in national tests and in the qualifications or credits they gain. (See also achievement).
<b>benchmark data</b>	This refers to assessment information that schools use to compare their performance with that of other schools.
<b>bilingualism or bilingual skills</b>	The ability to speak, read and write in two languages.
<b>careers education and guidance</b>	A planned programme to teach pupils about career opportunities and to provide each pupil with individual career guidance.
<b>collective worship</b>	By law, schools must hold collective worship (assemblies) which must be wholly or mainly Christian in nature.
<b>core subject indicator (CSI)</b>	This indicator shows the percentage of pupils who attain the level expected of them in mathematics, science and either English or Welsh as a first language.
<b>core Subjects</b>	English or Welsh, science and mathematics.
<b>English as an additional language (EAL)</b>	This refers to pupils whose first language is not English.
<b>exclusion</b>	When a learner is told not to come to school either for a fixed term (for example, one week) or permanently.
<b>key skills</b>	The key skills are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• speaking;</li><li>• listening;</li><li>• reading;</li><li>• writing;</li><li>• using numbers (numeracy); and</li><li>• using information and communications technology (ICT).</li></ul> The wider key skills for pupils aged 14 to 16 are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• problem solving;</li><li>• improving their own learning and performance; and</li><li>• working with others.</li></ul>

<b>Learning Pathways 14 - 19</b>	The National Assembly's strategies for developing and improving education and training opportunities for 14 to 19 year-olds referred to in 'The Learning Country' (2001) and 'Learning Country: Learning Pathways 14-19' (2002)
<b>learning support assistants</b>	Trained assistants, who work alongside qualified teachers in the classroom. They may work with an individual pupil or a group of pupils.
<b>looked-after children</b>	Children who the local authority has legal parental responsibilities for. The term is used to describe all children who are named in a care order, or who are provided with accommodation on a voluntary basis for more than 24 hours. Used to be called 'in care'.
<b>National Curriculum</b>	The subjects, and subject content, that all maintained schools must provide for all pupils.
<b>National Curriculum assessment</b>	For secondary schools, this is the assessment of pupils at the end of key stage 3 in English or Welsh, science and mathematics. In key stage 4, this is provided through a range of approved qualifications, the most common of these being the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE).
<b>personal and social education</b>	This includes all that a school carries out to promote the personal and social development of its pupils. It includes all the planned learning experiences and opportunities that take place not only in the classroom but also in other areas of school experience which are features of the values and community life of the school.
<b>public examinations</b>	Nationally recognised examinations commonly taken at 16 years of age and 18 years of age, usually the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and Advanced level (A level).
<b>pupils with additional learning needs</b>	Pupils who, for a wide range of reasons, have been identified as needing additional or modified support to help them learn successfully.
<b>pupils with special educational needs</b>	Those pupils, within the overall category of additional learning needs, who need specific support, which, for pupils with complex needs, may be recorded within a statement of special educational needs.
<b>school council</b>	A representative group of pupils elected by other pupils to discuss matters about their education and raise concerns with senior managers and governors of the school.
<b>similar schools</b>	All those secondary schools in Wales that have a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals.
<b>statutory requirements</b>	All of those aspects of school provision that the Welsh Assembly Government requires schools to provide.
<b>vocational studies (courses) work related education</b>	Courses of study related to career or employment skills. Teaching pupils about the nature of life in the workplace.

## Context

### The nature of the provider

- 1 Afon Taf High school is an 11 to 18 mixed comprehensive school situated in the village of Troedyrhiw, Merthyr Tydfil. There are 1087 pupils on roll compared with 1291 at the time of the previous inspection in March 2002. Pupils are drawn mainly from a group of small, urban villages in the southern part of the valley. Four of the villages, Troedyrhiw, Merthyr Vale, Trelewis and Bedlinog qualify for Communities First status. The area is relatively disadvantaged economically and 24 per cent of pupils are currently entitled to free school meals, which is well above the national average. The vast majority of pupils come from English speaking homes and less than one percent of pupils speak Welsh as a first language.
- 2 There is a full range of ability represented in the school but approximately two-thirds of pupils entering the school have a reading age which is below their chronological age. Eight percent of pupils are identified on the school's register of pupils with special educational needs and just over one percent of the pupil population has a statement of special educational need.
- 3 The formal timetable provides all pupils with a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum. In addition the school offers pupils a rich and wide range of extra curricular activities and learning opportunities.

### The school's priorities and targets

- 4 The school's clearly stated aim is to maximise potential and its stated purpose is "To provide opportunities for all members of Afon Taf High School to experience success and achieve their full potential".
- 5 The major priorities of the school as set out in the development plan are to:
  - raise levels of achievement;
  - continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning;
  - develop the high quality provision at post 16 in collaboration with other learning providers;
  - continue to develop the delivery of 14 to 19 Learning Pathways; and
  - improve the use of ICT across the curriculum.
- 6 The development plan identifies whole school targets to improve pupil achievement.

## Summary

- 7 The 2002 inspection report stated that Afon Taf High School had made considerable improvement in standards of achievement and quality of teaching since the 1995 inspection. Overall, across the school, this rate of improvement has slowed and in a few areas has stopped. Nevertheless, there are still many aspects of the school which are good with no important shortcomings and a small number have outstanding features. A significant strength of the school is the success with which it ensures the well being of its pupils.

### Table of grades awarded

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

- 8 The grades awarded to each of the seven Key Questions are all lower than those proposed by the school in its self-evaluation report.

### Standards

#### Grades for standards in subjects inspected

Subject	Key stage 3	Key stage 4	Post 16
Welsh second language	3	3	2
Mathematics	3	3	2
History	3	3	2
Geography	2	2	2
Music	3	3	3
Religious education (including religious studies)	1	1	2

- 9 Since the previous inspection, the improvement in standards observed in lessons has been limited. There has been improvement in Welsh (second language) at post 16,

in music in key stage 3 and in religious education in key stage 4. Standards in key stages 3 and 4 in history and mathematics, and music at post 16 have declined. All other standards have been maintained at their previous level.

10 The standards that pupils achieved in the six subjects inspected were:

75 lessons	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
Key stage 3	10%	41%	41%	8%	0%
Key stage 4	8%	44%	40%	8%	0%
Post 16	0%	73%	27%	0%	0%
Whole school	8%	47%	38%	7%	0%

(For an explanation of the grades, please see the beginning of the report)

- 11 The proportion of lessons graded 3 or better is the same as in 2002. The proportion graded 2 or better has fallen whilst those awarded grade 1 has remained the same. In 2008, three-quarters of lessons at post 16 had standards that were good with no important shortcomings, although none had outstanding features.
- 12 The ability of pupils on entry to Y7 in 2007, as measured by standardised tests, indicates that around two thirds have a reading age below their actual age.
- 13 In key stage 3, the results gained by the school have improved and are just below national averages. Over recent years these results have been close to Unitary Authority (UA) averages although they were slightly below these in 2007.
- 14 In key stage 4, there is no consistent trend for improvement in the proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades A\* to C. (37% in 2007). Results for this indicator are below both Wales and the UA. Girls achieve a greater proportion of higher grade passes than boys. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more A\* to G grades at GCSE matches the local and national average, and has been improving steadily over recent years.
- 15 GCSE results in English have shown a trend for improvement, whilst mathematics and science have declined relative to national averages.
- 16 The proportion of students gaining two or more A to C grades at A Level has remained constant over recent years (60% in 2007). This is below the national average but above that of the UA. It does represent good improvement on the 35% noted in the previous inspection. The proportion of students gaining grades A to E is 96%, which is above the national average.
- 17 When compared with the performance of similar schools, results are mixed. Most indicators are positive, but mathematics and science in key stage 3 compare less well.
- 18 Pupils with additional learning needs make good progress and most gain some qualification before leaving the school.
- 19 For the six subjects inspected, less than one lesson in ten had outstanding features. These lessons included the very good progress made by pupils, their factual

knowledge and the depth of their understanding of the units of work they were studying.

- 20 In almost half of lessons there were good features and no important shortcomings. In these lessons pupils were able to give thoughtful responses to issues raised, had good recall of previous work, and showed concentration and stayed focused on their work throughout the lesson.
- 21 In just under half of the lessons seen there were shortcomings. In these lessons pupils often failed to stay focused on their work throughout the lesson, frequently had incomplete work in their books and their work lacked the necessary depth and detail to explain points being made.
- 22 Most pupils' listening skills are good. Able pupils extend their spoken responses but those of middle and lower ability have difficulty in adapting language to audience with appropriate use of Standard English.
- 23 Reading skills are good in relation to ability. Pupils with additional educational needs make good progress. Post 16 students demonstrate good development of critical analysis skills.
- 24 All pupils write in a range of forms and for different purposes. Most pupils can extend their writing when required. Almost all pupils of middle and lower abilities are less confident in structuring their writing. Technical skills of spelling and punctuation are in line with abilities. At post 16, students' writing is well organised and usually well expressed.
- 25 The numerical skills of pupils and students are mostly good, especially with the more able.
- 26 Pupils gain good information communication and technology (ICT) skills in their taught lessons in key stage 3 but do not apply them sufficiently well in all the subjects they are taught. Computers are readily available at lunchtimes and breaks. Good use is made of ICT to support the studies of pupils with additional learning needs.
- 27 Pupils' and students' bilingual skills are not well developed. Only a small proportion of pupils are able to acquire any accreditation in Welsh.
- 28 The behaviour of the vast majority of pupils is very good. In lessons and around the public areas of school they are polite, respectful of each other and their teachers and are courteous to visitors. A small number of pupils in some classes disturb lessons. Pupils understand the values and expectations promoted by the school. The majority of pupils have a positive attitude to their work. The behaviour and attitudes of post 16 students are outstanding.
- 29 Post 16 students respond well to opportunities to develop confidence and independence, so that by Y13 there are many examples of students confidently contributing to the life of the school.
- 30 Pupils make good progress in personal, social and moral development. They engage enthusiastically in charitable work, adopt roles such as school councillors and participate well in extra curricular activities.

- 31 Pupils have good understanding of issues of equal opportunities and they are sensitive towards diversity in society. Pupils are taught effective strategies to deal with bullies and are confident that they would be supported if incidents of bullying did occur.
- 32 In the last school year, overall attendance averaged 91.8% and so far this year is averaging over 92%. There has been outstanding improvement since the previous inspection.

### **The quality of education and training**

- 33 The following table shows the grades awarded for the quality of teaching and assessment in all the lessons observed during the inspection. All teachers at the school were observed teaching.

172 lessons	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
Key stage 3	13%	47%	34%	6%	0%
Key stage 4	3%	57%	35%	5%	0%
Post 16	0%	78%	22%	0%	0%
Whole school	7%	56%	32%	5%	0%

(For an explanation of the grades, please see the beginning of the report)

- 34 The grades awarded are below the national profile in Her Majesty's Chief Inspector's (HMCI) annual report for 2006-7. There has also been a decline in quality since the previous inspection. Although no lessons were awarded a grade 1 at post 16, there were good features and no important shortcomings in 78% of lessons.
- 35 There are good, constructive relationships between teachers and pupils. The high quality of relationships between teachers and post 16 students is particularly noticeable.
- 36 Teachers' subject knowledge is good. Occasionally teachers teach outside their main area of expertise, which sometimes has an effect on standards of achievement.
- 37 Generally, teachers plan their lessons well. In many lessons, teachers clearly identify the key skills they expect pupils to apply and practise.
- 38 In lessons which were graded 2 or better, teachers show enthusiasm for their subject and challenge and motivate pupils. In many of these lessons, teachers have high expectations of pupils. At post 16 there is more in-depth open questioning to measure students' understanding and depth of knowledge.
- 39 Some of these good features are also present in grade 3 and 4 lessons. However, in two-fifths of lessons, there are significant shortcomings. In these, the objectives for learning and the quality of work teachers expect are not made clear. In some lessons, teachers' expectations are not high enough, with the tasks set being too predictable and lacking sufficient challenge.
- 40 In a small proportion of lessons, teachers allow pupils to chatter and this slows the pace of learning, and at post 16, some lessons limit the students' opportunities to interact and discuss their work in order to enrich their understanding.

- 41 Learning support assistants provide effective support for pupils with learning and behavioural difficulties. Where appropriate, teachers include opportunities to raise pupils' awareness of race and gender, equal opportunities and healthy life-styles in their teaching strategies.
- 42 There is a school database to record and monitor the progress made by pupils. The use of this database is being refined and it is not yet fully effective across the school. Marking and day-to-day assessment are inconsistent in quality. There is some very good practice in some subjects which is not shared across the school. At post 16, assessment of students' work is good, with some outstanding examples.
- 43 A full annual report, which has improved in content since the previous inspection, is produced for each pupil.
- 44 The curriculum meets learners' needs. It offers balance, breadth, flexibility, cohesion and progression. The school has responded effectively to the Learning Pathways recommendations with its provision of some good alternative courses in key stage 4 and links with other secondary schools and colleges at post 16. There is outstanding provision for a small percentage of pupils who may not achieve at GCSE and have difficulty engaging fully in the mainstream curriculum.
- 45 Many (pupils' and students') learning and social experiences are enriched by the good range of extra curricular activities offered by the school. Large numbers take part in sporting activities, gaining considerable success at both local and national levels. The biennial school production is extremely successful and offers many pupils of all ages and abilities a valuable range of experiences.
- 46 Regular good quality assemblies are held. However, in some tutor-groups, and one assembly, there was insufficient opportunity for learners to reflect on the prepared themes and readings.
- 47 The school's emphasis on the fostering of respect, consideration for others and responsible behaviour is apparent in its life and daily organisation.
- 48 Pupils' cultural development is successfully encouraged through a number of valuable activities and visits to places of interest. There is, however, a need to develop the Welsh ethos across the curriculum and to celebrate the culture of Wales more effectively.
- 49 Effective partnerships with parents, community, education providers and other institutions provide good support for learning. The programmes for personal, social and health education, work-related education and careers education and guidance are carefully planned and meet the Welsh Assembly Government's (WAG) guidelines. Entrepreneurial skills are well developed by the school.
- 50 The school has made good progress in promoting sustainable development and has been successful in gaining the Eco-schools bronze and silver awards.
- 51 The school plans and manages its care arrangements very effectively. The school is a happy and caring community. Teachers work very hard to promote personal

development and to identify and address the problems of underachievement. Procedures for monitoring academic and personal progress have been established. However, the academic support provided is not always effective.

- 52 The school works closely with social services to provide effective support for pupils who are looked after by the UA.
- 53 The induction programme for new pupils is good as are the relationships with partner primary schools. Teachers and the Careers Officer offer good guidance to pupils when they make career choices as they transfer to Y10, Y12 and further education.
- 54 The school council makes a positive contribution to the life of the school. It has been invited to nominate representatives to join the governing body but as yet has not accepted this offer.
- 55 Standards in relation to healthy eating are good. The school council has been very active in promoting different projects, and was recognised for its efforts when the school gained the Healthy Schools Award.
- 56 The school's procedures for child protection meet fully statutory requirements. Procedures for ensuring learners' well being are very good and occasionally outstanding. Parents and learners are confident that the school would respond without delay to any case of unfairness or discrimination.
- 57 The provision for pupils with additional learning needs is good and the school's response to the requirements of the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice is very good.
- 58 Subject teachers provide suitable work for pupils with additional learning needs. They are well informed and have pupils' Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and Individual Behavioural Plans (IBPs). The inclusion of the main points of the IEPs and IBPs in pupils' Individual Action Planners is an outstanding initiative. At the end of Y11, all pupils on the special educational needs register gained external accreditation last year.
- 59 Provision in the learning support unit is good and pupils make good progress. The school achieves a good level of success in enabling pupils with emotional or disruptive behaviour to improve their behaviour.
- 60 Pupils' understanding of racial and social equality is successfully promoted through the curriculum as well as through acts of communal worship and extra curricular activities. The school has procedures which would deal very strongly with any racist incident. The 'House of Religions' is an outstanding and well used resource.
- 61 The school has a relevant policy on the Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan.
- 62 The school works very hard to promote social inclusion. Its pastoral system and support from outside agencies combine to offer outstanding help to any learner experiencing difficulty in school, at home or in the community.

## **Leadership and management**

- 63 School documentation, including the development plan and the prospectus for parents, clearly identify the aims and purposes of the school. A regular meeting structure provides effective and appropriate opportunities to share goals and values.
- 64 The leadership provided by the headteacher and his deputies is effective and identifies appropriate priorities for improvement. Management of the processes of change and improvement are not always effective and sometimes lack sufficient rigour and consistency.
- 65 All the necessary policies have been agreed and approved by the governors.
- 66 Although the majority of departments are well managed, the quality of middle management across the school is inconsistent. There are examples of outstanding practice and team work. Where practice is less good, there is an absence of quality assurance procedures, little detailed planning for improvement, and there are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and assessment within the subject.
- 67 The school's self-evaluation report accurately identified most of its strengths and shortcomings. There were, however, some omissions and some shortcomings were not given sufficient weight. The quality of departmental self-evaluations varies in both coverage and detail.
- 68 The school sets and agrees annual targets for attainment with the UA. In 2007, the school met around half of these targets. Target setting at school level does not make sufficient impact on standards.
- 69 The governors have a thorough knowledge of their school and their role in its management. They are well-informed. Overall, they fulfil their statutory duties well, although the school fails to meet the statutory requirement to provide every pupil with the opportunity to participate in a daily act of collective worship.
- 70 The well established Performance Management is the main system for the gathering of first hand evidence on the quality of classroom experiences.
- 71 There has been some improvement in those areas identified for improvement in the previous report. Outstanding progress has been made in improving attendance rates, Information technology and music have improved in key stage 3 and Welsh has improved at post 16. Although the use of information technology across the curriculum has improved it still needs further development. There has been an improvement both in the quality of reports to parents and in the tracking of pupils' progress. Pupil self-assessment has been well developed in some subjects but is variable in quality.
- 72 There are sufficient teachers and most are appropriately qualified for the subjects they teach. The learning support assistants work well with subject teachers. Support for new teachers is comprehensive and well co-ordinated.
- 73 All the non-teaching staff make valuable contributions to the smooth running of the school.

- 74 The quality and quantity of learning resources are adequate throughout the school. Provision of ICT equipment for the teaching of discrete information technology lessons and for some subjects is a good feature. In music, there are an inadequate number of computers and a lack of sound proofed practice rooms that limits group work.
- 75 Most class-rooms are fit for purpose and are well maintained. A good feature of the school is the very good condition of the pupils' toilets.
- 76 The financial management of the school is very effective. School spending is closely and carefully monitored. The school does not provide full value for money as there are some shortcomings in the standards achieved by pupils.

## Recommendations

**77 In order to raise standards of achievement the school should:**

- R1: improve the quality of teaching and learning by increasing the proportion of lessons which are good with no important shortcomings;
- R2: further develop the systematic and consistent monitoring of teaching and learning, and the quality and rigour of self-evaluation at all levels;
- R3: improve the quality and reliability of marking and assessment by the sharing of good practice;
- R4 increase the opportunities for all pupils to gain accreditation in Welsh in key stage 4;
- R5 improve the promotion of bilingualism and the Cwricwlwm Cymreig; and
- R6 meet the statutory requirement to provide all pupils with the opportunity to participate in a daily act of collective worship.

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 3:** Good features outweigh shortcomings

- 78 The grade awarded by the inspection team is one grade lower than that proposed by the school in its self-evaluation report. The grade 3 was awarded because standards observed in lessons, and limited trends for improvement in public examinations indicate that there is some underachievement.

### Key stage 3 and key stage 4

- 79 The following table shows the standards achieved in the six subjects of the curriculum inspected:

Subject	Key stage 3	Key stage 4
Welsh second language	3	3
Mathematics	3	3
History	3	3
Geography	2	2
Music	3	3
Religious education	1	1

(For an explanation of the grades, please see the beginning of the report)

- 80 Since the previous inspection, music has improved in key stage 3 as has religious education in key stage 4, mathematics and history have declined in both key stages and the other two other subjects have maintained their previous standards.
- 81 The standards that pupils achieved, at the different stages, in the six subjects inspected were:

64 lessons	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
Key stage 3	10%	41%	41%	8%	0%
Key stage 4	8%	44%	40%	8%	0%
Key stages 3 and 4	9%	42%	41%	8%	0%

(For an explanation of the grades, please see the beginning of the report)

- 82 The proportion of lessons awarded a grade 1 or 2 is below both the target for 2007 set by the WAG (65%), and the averages reported by HMCI for all those schools inspected in 2006/2007 (67% at key stage 3 and 71% at key stage 4). There has been a decline in observed standards since the previous inspection.

### Pupils' success in attaining agreed learning goals

- 83 Overall, the pupils at the school cover the full range of ability, but testing indicates that over two-thirds of the entry into Y7 in 2007 had a reading age two years or more below their actual age.

- 84 In key stage 3, the results gained have improved and are just below national averages. Over recent years these results are close to UA averages although they were slightly below these in 2007. English shows the strongest trend for improvement, whilst science, having improved in recent years, declined in 2007, as did performance in the core subject indicator (CSI). In 2007, girls achieved significantly higher results than boys in English and to a lesser degree, in mathematics. As a consequence, girls achieve higher scores in the CSI.
- 85 In key stage 4, there is no consistent trend for improvement in the proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades A\* to C. The year 2003 was a high point with 47% gaining this level of achievement (37% in 2007). Results for this indicator are below both Wales and the UA. Girls achieve a greater proportion of higher grade passes than boys.
- 86 GCSE results in English show a trend for improvement and are moving towards national averages. Whilst the average results for girls in mathematics have remained steady over recent years, those for boys have declined slightly. In science, the overall results for both genders have declined relative to national averages. Given these results in the core subjects, it is inevitable that the proportion of pupils gaining the CSI has declined over the last 4 years.
- 87 The proportion of pupils gaining five or more A\* to G grades at GCSE matches the local and national average, and has been improving steadily over recent years. In the three core subjects, pass rates for A\* to G grades equal local and national averages. For this qualification, boys' results have improved more significantly than those of girls since the previous inspection.
- 88 An analysis of examination results shows that, over the last two years, fewer than half of subjects have added value from key stage 3 to GCSE.
- 89 In key stage 3, the school has compared reasonably well against similar schools (see Glossary), but for 2007, results in science and mathematics compare poorly. In key stage 4, the school is around the mid point in comparison with these similar schools. However, only a very small increase in the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals would have moved the school into a higher free school meals band, where all the indicators would place it the top half of similar schools with several in the top quarter. For the current year, the free school meals proportion has fallen by some five percentage points.
- 90 The school agrees targets for examination attainment with the UA. For 2007, the school met two of four key stage 3 targets, narrowly failing to achieve the other two. At key stage 4, the school met its targets for the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A\* to G grades at GCSE, but failed to meet those for five or more grades A\* to C, or for the CSI. The targets agreed define a ten point range, and are therefore challenging for the upper half of each.
- 91 Pupils with additional learning needs are given good support and make good progress relative to their abilities. Increasing numbers gain some qualification before leaving the school.

## **Pupils' progress in learning**

- 92 For the six subjects inspected, fewer than one lesson in ten had some outstanding features and these were all in religious education. Features of these lessons included the very good progress made by pupils, their factual knowledge and the depth of understanding of the units of work they were studying.
- 93 In four out of ten lessons there were good features and no important shortcomings. In these lessons pupils:
- were able to give thoughtful responses to issues raised;
  - had good recall of previous work;
  - used appropriate specialist vocabulary confidently;
  - carried out investigations and enquiry well; and
  - showed concentration and stayed focused on their work throughout the lesson.
- 94 In just under half of the lessons seen there were shortcomings. In these lessons pupils:
- often failed to stay focused on their work throughout the lesson;
  - frequently had incomplete work in their books;
  - lacked mastery of the appropriate specialist vocabulary;
  - did not extend either their oral or written answers; and
  - their work lacked the necessary depth and detail to explain points being made.
- 95 Able pupils make good progress in most areas of the school, and are therefore well prepared for the next stage in their education or training. The progress made by other pupils is more variable, so that for some, insufficient progress is made and their preparation for future educational opportunities is less secure.
- 96 Listening skills are good. Most pupils listen with respect and attention to their teachers and to one another. They respond to instruction promptly, answer questions willingly and contribute to class discussion. Able pupils are able to extend their responses. Pupils are less confident when speaking in a more formal situation. Those of middle and lower abilities have difficulty in adapting language to audience with appropriate use of Standard English.
- 97 Reading skills are good in relation to ability. Pupils with additional learning needs make good progress. All read an appropriately wide range of texts and interpretation in line with abilities. By the end of key stage 4, able pupils develop good skills of critical analysis including inference and deduction although all pupils tend to be over-reliant on their teachers.
- 98 All pupils write in a range of forms and for different purposes. Most pupils can extend their writing when required. Discursive writing is good in relation to abilities. Able pupils usually present and support opinions well. Narrative writing, particularly that of the more able pupils is good. Almost all of middle and lower ability pupils are less confident in structuring their writing. In key stage 4, over half of these pupils have difficulty in adding detail to support ideas and opinions. In both key stages, about half are insufficiently aware of audience. They do not fully understand the differences between speech and writing, although drafting leads to improvement. Technical skills

of spelling and punctuation are in line with abilities and in those subjects where there is good practice and support for writing, good progress is made.

- 99 The numerical skills of pupils in both key stages have good features outweighing shortcomings. There is evidence of good and very good standards especially with the more able. Those needing support in numeracy receive extra time-tabled tuition, from which they benefit greatly. A small minority of pupils lack confidence in their numerical skills and when applying this knowledge to varying everyday situations.
- 100 Pupils gain good ICT skills in their taught lessons in key stage 3 but do not apply them sufficiently well in all the subjects they are taught. In the main, subjects are able to access computers during lessons, and the school is in the process of increasing computer availability. Computers are readily available at lunchtimes and breaks. Pupils are enthusiastic but in some subjects they lack sufficient direction to make best use of their skills. Good use is made of ICT to support the studies of pupils with additional learning needs.
- 101 Pupils' bilingual skills are not well developed. Only a small proportion of pupils are able to acquire any accreditation in Welsh. Very limited amounts of spoken Welsh are heard outside Welsh lessons.

### **The development of pupils' personal, social and learning skills**

- 102 The behaviour of the vast majority of pupils in both key stages is very good. In lessons and especially around the public areas of school they are polite, respectful of each other and their teachers and are courteous to visitors. A small number of pupils in some classes do not adhere to the code of conduct and disturb lessons. Good classroom management by teachers generally prevents these pupils from disrupting learning. Relationships with teachers are generally good and the ethos of the school is relaxed and pleasant.
- 103 Pupils understand the values and expectations promoted by the school. The majority of pupils have a positive attitude to their work. Able pupils in particular are well motivated, co-operative and want to succeed. Pupils are usually well organised and generally good use is made of planners to record information such as homework, targets and merits.
- 104 Pupils make good progress in personal, social and moral development. They engage enthusiastically in charitable work, adopt roles such as school councillors and participate well in extra curricular activities. They are respectful of their environment and engage in recycling, bulb planting and litter picking. Some have worked well to enhance the school's sensory garden.
- 105 There is good understanding of issues of equal opportunities and pupils are sensitive towards diversity in society. Pupils with disabilities are well integrated and their needs are generally understood. Good links are forged with a local special school and pupils have successfully engaged in projects with pupils of this school. In lessons of personal development, pupils have developed good relationships with the Community Police Officer and there is good understanding of the community in which they live. Pupils have a good understanding of issues of bullying partly as a result of the work of the Equal Opportunities Croeso Project. They are taught effective

strategies to deal with bullies and are confident that they would be supported if incidents of bullying did occur.

- 106 In the last school year overall attendance averaged 91.8% and so far this year it is averaging over 92%. These figures put the school currently at the top in the UA and are well above the 90.7% national average for all schools. Comparison with similar schools in Wales, where attendance averages between 87% and 89%, illustrates Afon Taf High School's outstanding achievement. Absence is mostly for medical reasons.
- 107 Pupils' punctuality is generally good; lateness, either to school or to individual lessons is usually associated with circumstances beyond the control of pupils, such as school transport or adjacent lessons being at opposite ends of the school buildings.
- 108 In general, pupils make relevant progress in the development of their wider key skills.
- 109 Their ability to work with others is good. In pair and group activities, pupils co-operate sensibly and productively with each other.
- 110 When challenged in extra curricular activities and in some subjects, pupils persevere well to investigate open-ended tasks. In these instances, they are fully engaged in decision making and use their initiative well to solve a range of problems. There are lessons, however, where pupils are insufficiently challenged to think for themselves.
- 111 Pupils are often creative in the development and presentation of their ideas and solutions. Their posters, leaflets, design work and practical outcomes in art, design and technology, textiles and religious education show good flair, imagination and originality.
- 112 Whilst pupils are increasing their skills of target setting and self assessment, a significant number lack independent learning skills and do not actively seek to improve their own learning and performance.

### Post 16

Subject	Post 16
Welsh second language	2
Mathematics	2
History	2
Geography	2
Music	3
Religious education	2

(For an explanation of the grades, please see the beginning of the report)

- 113 Four of the six inspected subjects have maintained their good standards recorded in the previous inspection. Welsh has improved whilst music has fallen back by one grade. Standards in subjects at post 16 are stronger than key stages 3 and 4.

114 The standards that students achieved in the six subjects inspected were:

11 Lessons	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
Post 16	0%	73%	27%	0%	0%

(For an explanation of the grades, please see the beginning of the report)

115 HMCI's report for schools inspected in 2006/2007, indicates that on average 83% of lessons at post 16 were graded 1 or 2, with some 17% awarded a grade 1. Although only 11 lessons were seen, it is notable that no lessons at Afon Taf were awarded a grade 1. The standards seen in three-quarters of lessons were good with no important shortcomings.

116 Other than a peak in 2003, the proportion of students gaining two or more A to C grades at A level has remained constant (60% in 2007). Whilst below the national average, it is above that of the UA. It represents good improvement on the 35% noted in the previous inspection. The average points score gained by students matches that of the UA but is also below the Wales figure. The proportion of students gaining grades A to E, 96%, is above the national average.

117 For 2006 and 2007, an analysis of results shows that fewer than half of all subjects gave added value from GCSE to A level.

#### **Students' success in attaining agreed learning goals**

118 Almost three-quarters of the lessons seen had good features with no important shortcomings. In these lessons, students had good levels of background information, good subject knowledge and were able to articulate their views with confidence. They carried out research and investigation thoroughly and were confident when making contributions to class discussions.

119 In a small number of lessons, their subject knowledge was less secure and some students showed a lack of detail and depth in their classroom discussions and notes.

#### **The development of students' personal, social and learning skills**

120 The behaviour and attitudes of students are outstanding. They listen respectfully to their teachers and peers. They respond to questions in lessons and recall knowledge well. About two-thirds of students contribute to class discussions. Able students in Y13 usually extend their responses and are more confident and articulate. There is good understanding of subject specific vocabulary which able students use confidently. Good standards are achieved in presenting work and information to an audience.

121 Reading skills are good. Almost all students respond with good understanding to a range of challenging texts. Students in Y13 show that good progress is made in the development of their critical analysis skills, although those in Y12 are more reliant on their teachers.

122 Writing skills are good in relation to abilities. Writing is often well organised and usually well expressed. Good progress is made in the development of ideas and opinions, although a small number write with insufficient depth and detail. Students

demonstrate competence in the use of relevant quotations. All adapt language, style and form to suit the purpose of their writing.

- 123 The numerical skills of students have good features and no important shortcomings. They use and apply these skills competently in various subject areas.
- 124 Students make adequate use of ICT to support their studies. Although students are often capable, ICT use is not a strong feature of their work in some subjects.
- 125 Students' bilingual skills are not well developed.
- 126 Attendance levels are very good.
- 127 Good progress is made in the development of students' personal, social and learning skills. They are courteous and respectful and in lessons they show positive attitudes to learning. They are well motivated, focused and responsive to guidance from teachers.
- 128 Students respond well to opportunities to develop confidence and independence so that by Y13 there are many examples of them confidently contributing to the life of the school. Students often present information well to younger pupils in lessons of personal development. In these situations they act as good role models. They successfully act as 'buddies' to help younger pupils develop strategies to deal with bullies and present these strategies in lessons of personal development. Some are trained to act as mentors to support the development of reading. Others work closely with the Community Police Officer to present dramatic scenes to younger pupils which focus on social and moral issues. They also develop personal and social skills by being involved in competitions and the school's council.
- 129 Students collaborate effectively with each other. Many display mature and competent problem solving skills. Good examples are seen in lessons in art, computing, design and technology, English, health and social care and personal development, where ideas, solutions and outcomes are often innovative and creative.
- 130 Most students take the necessary measures to review their own progress and identify strategies for improvement.
- 131 The school provides a wide range of interactions and learning opportunities for students to develop as fully rounded individuals. They gain a good and well-balanced understanding of the world of work and their communities, and are well prepared to contribute positively to these.

## The quality of education and training

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

**Grade 3:** Good features outweigh shortcomings

132 The grade awarded is one lower than the grade proposed by the school in its self-evaluation report. The grade 3 was awarded because there were shortcomings in the standards of teaching and assessment in a significant number of lessons, particularly in key stages 3 and 4.

#### Key stages 3 and 4

133 The following table shows the grades we awarded for the quality of teaching and assessment in lessons observed in key stages 3 and 4 during the inspection.

140 Lessons	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
Key stage 3	13%	47%	34%	6%	0%
Key stage 4	3%	57%	35%	5%	0%
Key stages 3 & 4	8%	52%	35%	5%	0%

(for an explanation of the grades, please refer to the beginning of the report)

### How well teaching and training meets learners' needs and the curricular or course contents

134 The grades awarded for the quality of teaching and assessment are below the national profile in HMCI's annual report for 2006/2007. Nationally, teaching and assessment was awarded a grade 2 or better in 76% of lessons, and grade 3 or better in 97% of lessons.

135 There has also been a decline in the standard of teaching and assessment since the previous inspection when 69% of lessons in these two key stages were judged to be the equivalent of grades 1 and 2. The figure also falls well short of the 2010 target for secondary schools for 80% of lessons to be graded 2 or better.

136 The atmosphere in the vast majority of lessons is supportive and friendly as a result of the good, constructive relationship between teachers and pupils. The teachers know their pupils well and they are willing to give guidance and praise, regardless of sex, race or disability.

137 Most teachers' subject knowledge is good and they are familiar with new developments in their field. In lessons with good and outstanding features, teachers show considerable enthusiasm for their subject and make their lessons engaging and relevant to pupils. Where teachers teach outside their main area of expertise, some support is given, however the lack of linguistic background limits the standard of teaching in some Welsh lessons.

138 Generally, teachers plan their lessons well. In a small majority of lessons, they share their lesson objectives with pupils, so that pupils are clear about the standard of work

expected and what should be learnt by the end of the session. In many lessons, teachers clearly identify the key skills they expect pupils to apply and practise.

- 139 In lessons which were graded 2 or better, teachers show enthusiasm for their subject. They challenge and motivate pupils across the ability range to achieve at least good and, in a small percentage, high standards of work. In many of these lessons, teachers have high expectations of pupils. There are examples where the teaching is dynamic and varied and effective in keeping pupils focused on their work. In a number of subjects, teachers make pupils fully aware of the progress they are making and how they can further improve their performance. Generally, teachers prepare good quality learning resources.
- 140 Some of these good features are also present in grade 3 and 4 lessons. However, in two-fifths of lessons, there are significant shortcomings. In a number of lessons, the objectives for learning and the quality of work teachers expect are not made clear. In some lessons, teachers' expectations are not high enough, with the tasks set being too predictable and lacking sufficient challenge. Other shortcomings identified included over-direction by the teacher, insufficient variety in the strategies used, and little use of ICT. Pupils are not always entirely clear what they have achieved, or how they might have done something better.
- 141 In a small proportion of lessons, teachers allow pupils to chatter and this slows the pace of learning.
- 142 A small number of learning support assistants provides some effective support for pupils with learning and behavioural difficulties. The majority of teachers have a good understanding of the learning needs of these pupils. Where appropriate in their teaching strategies, teachers include opportunities to raise pupils' awareness of race and gender, equal opportunities and healthy life-styles.

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

- 143 The procedures and practices for the assessment, recording and reporting of pupils' achievements have good features that outweigh shortcomings.
- 144 The school's policy provides a sound framework for the development of assessment, recording and reporting. Practice is generally good in design and technology, English, geography, modern foreign languages and religious education. In these subjects, improvements have been made in the quality of feedback to pupils but there are still inconsistencies in practice in the day-to-day assessment of pupils' work in history, mathematics, music, science, and Welsh.
- 145 In both key stages, for example, not all teachers:
- communicate to pupils the learning objectives and outcomes of lessons;
  - write comments on day-to-day work which identify what was done well and how improvements may be made; and
  - involve pupils regularly in self and peer assessment so that they fully understand the criteria, their own strengths and areas where they need to improve.
- 146 A database has been established. Baseline information and teachers' assessments at the end of key stage 2 are entered onto the system. These are used together with

results of spelling and reading tests to aid the grouping of the pupils and to identify pupils with additional learning needs. Predictions of pupils' end of key stage attainments are usefully included on the database. All teachers have access to this information. Its use to track progress is developing. Current practice requires teachers to add a grade once each year for the attainment of pupils in key stage 4. Heads of year compare these grades with those predicted. Underachievement is identified and appropriate action including counselling and contact with parents is taken. This process has also been trialled in Y7 but in key stage 3 it is less effective. Use of the database to track pupils' progress is yet to be refined and embedded in practice but review of progress does occur. There is good liaison between subject staff and heads of year. Subject teachers identify underachievement continuously and there is referral to heads of year who take effective action.

- 147 Heads of department keep manageable records of pupils' achievements. Many departments are developing portfolios of marked work to be used as exemplars for teachers. This is effectively developing teachers' confidence in awarding levels in foundation subjects in key stage 3. Subject teachers ensure that pupils are aware of the criteria for success in external examinations and the requirements of examination boards. Heads of departments ensure that end of key stage assessments are accurate and fair by organising departmental moderation and standardisation. There is a less rigorous approach to the monitoring of day-to-day marking.
- 148 A full annual report is produced for each pupil supported by meetings for the parents/carers. The format of reports has been improved. This has resulted in a wider range of information for parents / carers and greater consistency of information given by departments. Reports usefully include comments on progress and targets for improvement in all subjects. Form tutors also comment on pupils' personal, social and learning skills. Pupils are required to reflect on their progress and agree targets for improvement. This is a useful process which pupils do with their form tutor's support. The targets set by subject teachers are less useful since they are inconsistent in quality. In key stage 3 in particular targets are insufficiently subject specific especially in history, mathematics, music, science and Welsh.
- 149 Heads of department organise internal tests and examinations. They analyse results of external examinations and prepare a written report with targets for improvement for the headteacher. In addition, they ensure that the requirements of examination boards, the National Curriculum and the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice are met.

## Post 16

### How well teaching and training meets learners' needs and the curricular or course contents

- 150 The following table shows the grades we awarded for the quality of teaching and assessment in lessons observed during the inspection:

32 lessons	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
Post 16	0%	78%	22%	0%	0%

(for an explanation of the grades, please refer to the beginning of the report)

- 151 Although no lessons were awarded a grade 1, there were good features and no important shortcomings in 78% of lessons. The high quality of relationship between teachers and students is particularly noticeable. Students commented on this feature during interviews with them.
- 152 Many of the good features are similar to those observed by inspectors in lessons in key stages 3 and 4. The additional features of good teaching are:
- more in-depth open questioning as a tool to measure students' understanding and depth of knowledge;
  - some opportunities for students to work independently and to improve their own learning;
  - complex subject concepts being clearly explained; and
  - opportunities for students to evaluate their own work and that of their peers constructively.
- 153 In the small number of grade 3 lessons, there were a number of good features to which reference has been made, however there were:
- limited teaching techniques and students receiving knowledge passively for a significant part of the lesson; and
  - limited opportunities for students to interact and discuss their work in order to enrich their understanding.

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

- 154 The assessment, recording and reporting of students' work is good. In religious education, there are outstanding features of assessment practices. In mathematics there are shortcomings, whilst it is good in all other subjects. In day-to-day assessment of work, teachers identify strengths and indicate how improvements may be made. Students are aware of the criteria for success and the requirements of examination boards.
- 155 Students are also aware of the minimum target grades that they are expected to achieve. Subject teachers are given predicted grades for each student. Predictions are based on prior attainment in GCSE examinations and in AS level examinations. Teachers monitor progress through day-to-day assessments. They identify under performance against the predicted grades and support students in making improvements. There is good communication between subject teachers and heads of year so that there is effective monitoring of progress across the range of subjects. The database is not yet used to track progress.
- 156 Parents/carers receive good detail on students' progress. Each year they receive a full report which provides a range of useful information. In addition, a parents'/carers' evening is arranged for each year group.

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

**Grade 3:** Good features outweigh shortcomings

157 The grade awarded is one lower than the grade proposed by the school in its self-evaluation report. The grade 3 was awarded because the school does not provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils and students.

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

158 The curriculum meets learners' needs. The school is successful in giving pupils and students the opportunity to achieve accreditation through a number of Learning Pathways; however only a small number of pupils gain accreditation in Welsh in key stage 4.

159 Overall, the curriculum offers balance, breadth, flexibility, cohesion and progression. The school has responded effectively to the Learning Pathways recommendations with its provision of some alternative courses in key stage 4 and links with other secondary schools at post 16.

160 The school strives to give all pupils and students equal access to all learning experiences. In key stage 3, all subjects are given sufficient time to cover the programmes of study. There are many opportunities to develop interests and gain many experiences in extra curricular activities.

161 In key stage 4, the provision includes a number of new GCSE courses including vocational courses in engineering, health and social care, sports education and the Certificate in Digital Applications. There is outstanding provision for a small percentage of pupils who may not achieve at GCSE and have difficulty engaging fully in the mainstream curriculum. They follow the core curriculum, one option and a life skills programme at school, and can study Level 1 vocational courses through the local 14-19 Network.

162 The curricular programme post 16 offers a good range of AS and A level courses at the school. This is supplemented by arrangements to study further courses at three local secondary schools. In addition, the school offers a further pathway where students follow a BTEC Diploma (4 GCSE equivalence) course at the school over 3 days, spend one day at college following a BTEC Certificate (2 GCSE equivalence), and on the other day they have work experience.

163 Overall, learning experiences develop basic and key skills well, with the school gaining the Basic Skills Quality Mark. The main key skills are mapped in all schemes of work, with a regular focus on the wider key skills in lesson plans. There are time-tabled key skill lessons in the sixth form, with students having the opportunity to gain accreditation.

164 Many learning and social experiences are enriched by a good range of extra curricular activities offered by the school. Large numbers take part in sporting activities, gaining considerable success at both local and national levels. The biennial

school production is extremely successful and offers many pupils of all ages and abilities a range of experiences. A number of clubs meet regularly and there are homework clubs organised for participants. A number of visits to theatres, field trips and abroad broaden learners' experiences.

- 165 The curriculum provides the learners with good opportunities to gain knowledge and insight into values and beliefs. They are encouraged to reflect on their own experiences, to consider life's fundamental questions, and to respect the beliefs of others and value their environment.
- 166 Regular assemblies are held throughout the week. Appropriate guidelines and materials are prepared for classroom corporate worship. In the majority of occasions, the ethos is respectful and relevant themes are considered. In some assemblies good participation by pupils and the use of music enhance the occasions. However, in some classroom acts of worship and one assembly, there was insufficient opportunity for learners to reflect on the prepared themes and the prepared readings and prayers remained unused.
- 167 The emphasis the school places on fostering respect, consideration of others and responsible behaviour is apparent in its life and daily organisation. Learners show care for those less fortunate than themselves, and through their Charity Committee they raise large sums of money for good causes. The great majority of learners respond sensibly in discussions of issues such as racism and human rights.
- 168 Learners respond well to each other, to the staff and to visitors. They respond well to opportunities to exercise responsibility through membership of the school council, work experience and as counsellors for younger pupils.
- 169 Pupils' cultural development is successfully fostered through a number of valuable activities and visits to places of interest. Representatives of different faiths are invited to school to talk to the learners. Aspects of the curriculum foster European and international awareness of the pupils. Awareness of Wales and its culture has not been developed sufficiently and there is a lack of Welsh ethos both across the curriculum and in other aspects of school life.
- 170 There are effective partnerships with parents, community, education providers and other institutions that provide good support for learning. The key features are:
- the overall good quality of school literature to parents, amongst which the prospectus is an exceptionally well presented and informative document;
  - the outstanding collaboration with the community, whereby local institutions are supported by pupils' activities and many local enterprises support curriculum delivery;
  - the extensive links with other local schools and colleges to extend curriculum provision;
  - the well-established pastoral and developing curricular liaisons with the primary schools; and
  - the established links with several initial teacher training institutions, through which students bring fresh perspectives to the classroom.

171 There are no important shortcomings but the following weaknesses were noted:

- the absence of newsletters to inform parents of pupils' enterprises, successes and achievements; and
- a scarcity of opportunity for parents to express their views via school survey questionnaires or through a parent-teacher association.

172 The programmes for personal, social and health education, work-related education and careers education and guidance are carefully planned. They give pupils and students a rich experience which meets Welsh Assembly guidelines.

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

173 Overall, the school provides good work-related education.

174 All Y10 pupils and those Y12 students whose career paths warrant it undertake a useful work experience placement. There is good preparation for these placements, supported by beneficial professional input from Careers Wales and links arranged through the Education Business Partnership.

175 There is extensive support for work-related education across all key stages, provided through activity days, business challenges, speakers from the work-place, mentoring and provision of mock interviews. However, opportunities for pupils to meet a range of employers directly, and to explore their own career options, are limited.

176 The provision for the development of bilingualism throughout the school has some good features but shortcomings in important areas. Curricular provision for Welsh is good in key stage 3. At key stage 4, it is good for pupils choosing to follow the full GCSE course, as it is for students choosing to study the subject post 16. However, in key stage 4, the lack of an accreditation route for most pupils and the impact of non-specialist teachers, seriously hinder the development of bilingualism.

177 Bilingualism is rarely promoted across other subjects in the curriculum and visits involving the Welsh language and culture are not common. Welsh is seldom heard in classrooms, apart from in the Welsh department in lessons, tutor periods and in some assemblies.

178 Although Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig is sign posted in a number of schemes of work, the planning for its implementation is cursory. There is evidence in history and design technology that reflects good practice, but Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig is not embedded in the ethos of the school.

179 Good progress has been made in beginning to raise the awareness of sustainable development. A number of initiatives have led to the gaining of the Eco-schools bronze and silver awards, and the school has also been successful in gaining a £12,000 Welsh Assembly Government grant to further develop a recycling strategy.

180 The school maintains a good and current awareness of the needs of employers through:

- strong partnerships with Careers Wales and the local Education Business Partnership;

- the governors' understanding of the local community; and
- the mutually beneficial links with enterprises in the community.

- 181 Entrepreneurial skills are well developed by the school.
- 182 There are ample and good opportunities for pupils to engage in team-building and competitive skills activities. They meet and learn from entrepreneurs through the Dynamo Project. Enterprise days provide short-term opportunities to develop appropriate skills in key stages 3 and 4. There is regular participation in both the Young Enterprise Scheme and the Sony Small Business Challenge by groups of Y12 students which develop longer-term business skills. The school enjoys much success in these challenge and enterprise competitions.
- 183 Overall, the school has made progress in addressing national priorities. There are good features in the development of the transition programme, 14 to 19 Learning Pathways and key skills. However, the limited emphasis on the development of bilingualism is a significant shortcoming.

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

**Grade 2:** Good features and no important shortcomings

- 184 In its self-evaluation the school awarded itself a grade 1 for this question. The findings of the inspection team match most of the judgements made by the school. The award of a grade 2 reflects some shortcomings in a few aspects and the overall impact of support and guidance on the standards achieved by a number of pupils.

#### **The quality of care, support and guidance to students**

- 185 The school plans and manages its care arrangements very effectively. This ensures that the school is a happy and caring community.
- 186 Teachers work very hard to promote pupils' personal development and to identify and address the problems of underachievement. Procedures for monitoring academic and personal progress have been established. The academic support provided is not always effective.
- 187 A deputy headteacher monitors the pastoral teams and their work very well. Communication between members of the pastoral teams is good. There is a very good informal day-to-day communication between heads of year and their form tutors as well as regular useful formal meetings.
- 188 Relationships between form tutors and their pupils are good. Tutors know their pupils well and support and care for them as individuals.
- 189 The school works closely with social services to provide effective support for pupils who are looked after by the UA. Appropriate individual pastoral plans are in place and they are reviewed regularly.

- 190 There is a good relationship between the school, parents and the community. The school responds conscientiously to parents' enquiries and concerns. There is very good liaison with parents of pupils whose attendance or behaviour give rise for concern and for pupils who have additional learning needs.
- 191 The induction programme for new pupils is good as are the relationships with partner primary schools. Y7 pupils indicated that they had settled down quickly in their new school. The extra support given to Y7 pupils by post 16 students during the induction period is appreciated by them.
- 192 The teachers and the Careers Officer offer good guidance to pupils when they make career choices as they transfer to Y10, Y12 and to further or higher education.
- 193 The school co-operates effectively with Careers Wales and arranges appropriate periods of work experience for pupils in Y10 and those on vocational courses at post 16. These experiences are thoroughly monitored from the pupils' and the employers' perspective.
- 194 The personal development programme is good. It has a detailed structure, is comprehensive, and complies with national guidelines. Form tutors deliver the programme with additional input from a range of external speakers.
- 195 The school council makes a positive contribution to the life of the school. It has no representation on the governing body, although an invitation that was made was declined.
- 196 Standards in relation to healthy eating are good. The school council has been very active in promoting different projects, and was recognised for its efforts when the school gained the Healthy Schools Award.
- 197 Since the last inspection, the school has made outstanding progress in raising attendance. Good attendance is clearly an expectation of pupils and form tutors. Heads of year and school administrative staff are all conscientious in following school policy and procedures.
- 198 Links with outside agencies are good. It is a good feature that post 16 students have been trained by the police to teach youngsters in the area about the dangers of taking drugs.
- 199 The school's procedures for child protection fully meet statutory requirements. Procedures for ensuring learners' well being are good.

### **The quality of the provision for additional learning needs**

- 200 The quality of the provision for additional learning needs has good features and no important shortcomings.
- 201 The provision for pupils with additional learning needs is good and the school's response to the requirement of the Code of Practice is very good. All pupils on the special educational needs register have very good IEPs and IBPs. These relate very well to the pupils' individual needs. Good individual targets are set which are shared with the pupils and their parents or guardians.

- 202 Subject teachers are responsible for providing suitable work for pupils with additional learning needs. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) ensures teachers are well informed and distributes all relevant information. The inclusion of the main points of the IEPs and IBPs in pupils' Individual Action Planners is an outstanding initiative. There are very good examples of careful lesson planning to meet pupils' ability or additional educational needs. However, little use is made of the information in some subjects. At the end of key stage 4 all pupils on the special educational needs register gained outside accreditation last year.
- 203 The school has effective strategies to ensure pupils develop appropriate literacy skills. Teachers, learning support assistants and post 16 students provide effective individual teaching during morning assemblies. Records show that pupils are making good progress in their literacy skills.
- 204 Eight learning support assistants offer very good support for pupils with additional learning needs. However, the number of learning support assistants employed by the school is insufficient to meet the needs of all the pupils with additional learning needs.
- 205 Provision in the learning support unit is good and pupils make good progress. Very good integration opportunities are provided for all the pupils across the subjects and school activities.
- 206 The school achieves a good level of success in enabling pupils with emotional or disruptive behaviour to improve their behaviour. The SENCO and heads of year work closely together to ensure appropriate support. The 'Better Behave Quickly' project has been successful in encouraging a number of pupils who were in danger of being excluded to become more mature and take responsibility for their behaviour.
- 207 The SENCO provides very good guidance and is effectively supported by the special needs team. There are very good links with the parents, contributory primary schools and external agencies.

### **The quality of provision for equal opportunities**

- 208 The quality of provision for equal opportunities has many good features, some of which are outstanding. The school is successful in encouraging learners to have appropriate expectations.
- 209 Racial and social equality is successfully promoted across the curriculum as well as in acts of communal worship and extra curricular activities. The school has procedures which would deal very strongly with any racist incident. The 'House of Religions' is an outstanding resource that enables pupils to develop their awareness of racism and promote understanding of other people's lifestyles and beliefs.
- 210 A good range of practical and vocational courses are provided for pupils with additional learning needs and for pupils with challenging behaviour. There are a limited number of challenging courses for gifted pupils, which include a good joint project in geography and religious education.

- 211 The school monitors and compares the results of boys and girls well. Every subject option is available to both genders at key stage 4. The school tries hard to challenge stereotyping in advising pupils on subject choices for key stage 4 and post 16.
- 212 The school has outstanding measures to eliminate any bullying or harassment. Learners are confident that staff will deal with any incidents quickly and effectively. The school creates a climate where discrimination or unpleasantness of any sort will not be tolerated. Parents and learners are confident that the school would respond without delay to any case of unfairness or discrimination.
- 213 The school has a relevant policy on the Disability Equality Scheme and Action Plan. Parts of the school would be inaccessible to wheelchair users. At present there are no learners in that position.
- 214 The school works successfully to promote social inclusion, so that awareness permeates its activities and life. Its pastoral system and support from outside agencies combine to offer outstanding help for any learner experiencing difficulty in school, at home or in the community.

## Leadership and management

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

**Grade 3:** Good features outweigh shortcomings

215 In its self evaluation, the school awarded itself a grade 2 for this question. A grade 3 was awarded because there is underachievement as identified in key question 1, and there are inconsistencies in the impact of leadership and management across the school.

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

216 School documentation, including the development plan and the prospectus for parents, identify clearly the aims and purposes of the school. A regular meeting structure for heads of department and heads of year and for form tutors provides effective and appropriate opportunities to share goals and values.

217 The leadership provided by the headteacher and his deputies is effective and identifies appropriate priorities for improvement. Management of the processes of change and improvement are sometimes less effective and lack sufficient rigour and consistency. The effectiveness of cluster leaders is variable, the best practice being welcomed and appreciated by heads of department.

218 All the necessary policies have been agreed and approved by the governors and are of appropriate quality. Very good policy and practice exist concerning the well being of pupils, including work to eliminate bullying and to ensure the effectiveness of child protection procedures.

219 Whilst the majority of departments are well managed, there are nevertheless inconsistencies in quality across the school. There are several examples of outstanding practice where the sustained leadership, determination, vision and a sense of purpose and direction are of the highest quality. There are also instances of outstanding team work, commitment and mutual support. Where there is good practice, regular and minuted meetings are held, and there is a positive and supportive team ethos. All members of the department contribute to self-evaluation and development planning, there is regular discussion on teaching and learning and good practice is shared across the subject area. Where practice is less good, there are ineffective quality assurance procedures, little detailed planning for improvement, and there are inconsistencies in teaching and assessment. These departments are well co-ordinated and clear in their sense of direction and purpose.

220 The school gives good attention to the WAG initiatives and is developing 14 to 19 Learning Pathways well. It does not, however, promote bilingualism effectively.

221 The school sets and agrees annual targets for attainment with the UA. These are in the form of a target range covering ten percentage points, where the upper reaches of the range are deemed to represent an ambitious target. In 2007, the school failed

to reach the lower end of several of these ranges. The upper end of each represents more accurately where the school should be. Target setting at school level is not making a sufficient impact on standards.

- 222 The school works effectively in partnership with other schools and colleges.
- 223 Performance Management is securely in place and is the main process for evaluating the quality of teaching in the school. Appropriate objectives are identified for individual teachers which address school, subject and personal needs.
- 224 The governors have a thorough knowledge of their school and their roles in its management. They have a good awareness and understanding of the community that the school serves and a particularly good knowledge of the needs of employers. An appropriate range of committees discusses in detail the issues associated with their areas of responsibility. Governors are thus able to contribute positively to strategic planning and to act as credible critical friends.
- 225 Detailed reports from the headteacher, together with observations by governors linked to certain aspects of school ensure that meetings are well-informed. Governors constructively integrate this information into their good understanding of regional and national trends in education, employment and the needs of their community.
- 226 Overall, they fulfil their statutory duties well, although the school fails to meet the statutory requirement to provide every pupil with the opportunity to participate in a daily act of collective worship. The governing body provides a strong sense of identity and direction for the school and these are clearly communicated in the prospectus and the annual report to parents.

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

**Grade 3:** Good features outweigh shortcomings

- 227 In its self-evaluation, the school awarded itself a grade 1 for this question. A grade 3 was awarded because there is inconsistency in the quality and rigour of self-evaluation across the school. Although the school self-evaluation report correctly identified many of its strengths and shortcomings, it misjudged the importance of some shortcomings.

### **How effectively the school's performance is monitored and evaluated**

- 228 The school's self-evaluation report accurately identified most its strengths and shortcomings. There were, however, some omissions and some shortcomings were not given sufficient weight. The quality of self-evaluation in departments varies in both coverage and detail. There is good practice in some subjects where there are well established and accurate procedures which are shared with all members of the department. In other areas there is over reliance on informal procedures, reports are descriptive rather than evaluative, and there is little opportunity for all teachers to contribute.

- 229 Subjects share their analysis of examination results in the autumn term with their cluster leader, who shares them with the senior management team. There is a published schedule that requires each area to evaluate its performance against each of the seven Key Questions identified in this report. These are then collated at whole school level. As this part of the process is variable in quality and rigour, the resulting overall school self-evaluation report therefore lacks sufficient consistent quality and detail.
- 230 Performance Management is the main system for the gathering of first hand evidence on the quality of classroom experiences. This is well established and effective. Every teacher is observed as part of the process twice per year. Objectives for all teachers, and their training requirements, are identified appropriately. Other monitoring activities, which include classroom observations by the senior management team and by heads of department are more informal, and leave shortcomings in the senior leadership team's direct knowledge of the quality of education provided in the school, and in the standards being achieved by pupils and students.

### **The effectiveness of planning for improvement**

- 231 The school development plan covers the period 2007 to 2010. Whilst it identifies appropriate priorities, it does not contain any schedule within the three years for the attainment of the identified outcomes. Funding is allocated to the various activities in the development plan. Departmental plans, which include school priorities, are of variable quality. Where good practice is found, planning priorities with clear criteria for success for improvement are identified. Where planning is less good, there is often no indication of how improvement will be achieved.
- 232 Whilst the majority of heads of department have a good knowledge of the strengths and shortcomings of their own areas, this understanding is often independent of formal evaluation procedures.
- 233 The Performance Management process, and most departmental evaluations involve all staff. Pupils are consulted through the school council and, occasionally, through questionnaires. Parents are invited to contribute their views following parents' evenings.
- 234 Three Key Issues for Action highlighted in the 2002 report have not been fully addressed and are included appropriately in the current development plan.

### **The effectiveness of planning for improvement**

- 235 There has been some improvement in those areas identified for improvement in the previous report. Outstanding progress has been made in improving attendance rates which are now above the national average. Information technology and music have improved in key stage 3 and Welsh has improved post 16. Although the use of information technology across the curriculum has improved it still needs further development. There has been an improvement in both the quality of reports to parents and in the tracking of pupils' progress, although the latter is yet to be fully embedded in the activities of the school. Pupil self-assessment has been well developed in some subjects but is variable in quality.

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

**Grade 3:** Good features outweigh shortcomings

236 The grade awarded by the inspection team is lower than the grade 2 recorded in the school's self-evaluation report. The findings of the inspection team did not match a number of judgements made by the school. In particular, the school does not provide full value for money as there are shortcomings in the standards achieved by pupils.

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

237 The number of teachers is sufficient for the school to run effectively. The experience profile shows that about 43% of the teaching staff has 25 or more years experience and 18% have 10 years or less.

238 Most teaching staff are appropriately qualified and trained. However, where teachers work outside their specialist subject areas, there is, in a small number of instances, an adverse impact on standards.

239 The eight learning support assistants work effectively with subject teachers and the SENCO. However, the number of assistants is insufficient to support some pupils with additional learning needs in mainstream classes.

240 The clerical and administrative staff ensure that the offices, reception, reprographic area and the library run efficiently. The site manager manages effectively the school site overall. He and the two caretakers are responsible for the day-to-day maintenance and contribute effectively to the daily routines of the school.

241 The full time school nurse makes a valuable contribution to the personal development programme and provides a counselling role.

242 There is very good technician support in design and technology, information technology and science.

243 The quality and quantity of learning resources for both key stages 3 and 4 have good features and no important shortcomings. The range and supply of text books is adequate and the school produces a range of good quality subject materials in-house. For post 16 students, the provision of resources is good.

244 Provision of ICT equipment for the teaching of discrete information technology (IT) and a limited number of subjects across the curriculum is a good feature. There are three main IT rooms with other suites in business studies, design and technology, mathematics, and additional learning needs. An additional suite is dedicated to the use of computer based learning programmes. When these rooms are not time-tabled for IT, there is limited access for other subjects.

245 There are too few computers in music. As a result work on aspects of composing is difficult for pupils in key stage 4 and at post 16.

- 246 There are 16 interactive white boards and 25 digital projectors. They are used effectively to enhance the quality of teaching in a number of subject areas.
- 247 Each classroom has a desk top computer that is used to record attendance using a fingertip system. Teachers also use these computers to enhance their teaching with the use of digital projectors, or to produce overhead projector transparencies. However, a number of the overhead projectors do not produce sharp, clear images on the screens. This is a shortcoming.
- 248 The library, which is well run by the librarian, is open all day. In addition it offers a homework club on three days a week. The stock of fiction and reference books is just under the recommended levels. Subjects across the curriculum use the library effectively and many pupils use it for independent learning. The 15 computers are used by small classes, and by pupils to improve the presentation of their work and for research on the Internet.
- 249 The accommodation has good features and no important shortcomings. It is sufficient for the number of pupils and students currently on roll, and meets the pastoral and academic needs of the curriculum. Most rooms are large enough and are well maintained and decorated. Post 16 students have their own large and well used study room, which has three computers. Their other work area is the library. They are responsible for their small common room and use it well.
- 250 The school has a fresh appearance. There are colourful and attractive displays in most classrooms and corridors. These are good features. A specifically good feature of the school is the very good condition of the pupils' toilets.
- 251 In music, the lack of sound proofed practice rooms limits group work and is a shortcoming.
- 252 Grounds and buildings are clean and litter free.

**How effectively and efficiently resources are managed to provide value for money**

- 253 The deployment and management of staff are good. For most teachers, there is effective use of their time, expertise and experience.
- 254 The professional development of most teaching staff is effective and enhances the learning process. Training is linked to the development of staff in line with Performance Management, the school development plan and the needs of departments and individuals. It is well co-ordinated and courses attended by staff are evaluated and used to the benefit of the school. However, the failure to meet the development needs of a small number of teachers working outside their main area of qualification is a shortcoming.
- 255 The programmes and support for newly qualified teachers, for the extended professional development of recently qualified teachers, and for initial teacher training students are comprehensive and well co-ordinated.
- 256 The school has implemented its strategy for the workload agreement.

- 257 The headteacher, after consulting all interested bodies, is nearing the end of the staged implementation of the school's pay structure for the new teaching and learning responsibilities.
- 258 The financial management of the school is good. The school pursues conscientiously all grants and sponsorship that are available.
- 259 Salary costs for the school are relatively high due to the age profile of the staff. Together with other commitments, this means that careful financial decisions have to be taken. These decisions are well focused on the curriculum needs and the educational priorities identified in the school development plan. The finance committee meets regularly and receives detailed up to date reports from the headteacher.
- 260 At present, the distribution of funds to subjects consists of an agreed allocation plus a 'development fund' that is distributed through a bidding system.
- 261 A deputy headteacher is responsible for the competent day to day running of the school's finances. School spending is closely and carefully monitored.
- 262 The minor recommendations of the recent auditor's report have been addressed.
- 263 The school does not provide full value for money as there are some shortcomings in the standards achieved by pupils.

## Standards achieved in subjects and areas of learning

### Welsh second language

Key stage 3:	Grade 3:	Good features outweigh shortcomings
Key stage 4:	Grade 3:	Good features outweigh shortcomings
Post 16:	Grade 2:	Good features and no important shortcomings

264 Over recent years the proportion of pupils gaining GCSE grades A\* to C has been above the national average. For 2007, results were lower than the UA average.

265 At A level, for the last two years, the proportion of students gaining A to C grades has been below both national and local averages.

266 More girls than boys enter for examinations in Welsh.

#### Good features

##### Key stage 3

267 Most pupils respond well orally and enjoy good relationships with their teachers.

268 Reading and listening comprehension skills are well developed across the key stage.

269 Pupils' written work is well structured and often of good length. Language structures are appropriate and spelling is developing well.

270 All pupils listen well; they understand basic commands, instructions and can give simple explanations and opinions in the present tense effectively.

##### Key stage 4

271 The more able pupils following the full GCSE course make good progress. They are confident in their oral work. They work well in pairs and in groups, asking and answering questions correctly. They display good knowledge of vocabulary and they use appropriate language patterns successfully.

272 More able pupils read well and respond to various stimuli to prompt further discussion effectively.

273 Many pupils speak confidently and can express opinions on a wide range of issues and can develop ideas logically and with good intonation.

274 A significant minority of pupils with additional learning needs make good progress in reading and listening.

##### Post 16

275 Y12 students understand the historical background of the film they study and analyse the role played by the various characters well.

- 276 Y13 students' oral responses to modern Welsh poetry are mature with good use of specialist literary terminology.
- 277 Y12 and Y13 students gain confidence in their oral work. They willingly give extended responses.
- 278 Students have a positive attitude and use the target language well. They present work and convey information using ICT proficiently in a group.

### **Shortcomings**

#### **Key stage 3**

- 279 A minority of pupils do not extend their oral skills enough.
- 280 More able pupils do not extend their writing sufficiently.
- 281 Pupils' ICT skills are under-developed.

#### **Key stage 4**

- 282 The majority of pupils do not follow the full GCSE course and do not receive a suitable formal accreditation at the end of key stage 4; this is a significant shortcoming.
- 283 Extended oral and written responses and spelling and presentation of tasks are often unsatisfactory.
- 284 A minority of more able pupils are not challenged enough.
- 285 A number of short course pupils have difficulty recalling previously learnt work and their vocabulary is more limited in their writing work. They are also uncertain when using language structures.

#### **Post 16**

- 286 There are no important shortcomings.

### **Mathematics**

Key stage 3:	Grade 3	Good features outweigh shortcomings
Key stage 4:	Grade 3	Good features outweigh shortcomings
Post 16:	Grade 2	Good features and no important shortcomings

- 287 GCSE examination results over the last three years have declined marginally. For A\* to C and A\*/A, they are well below national averages but are broadly in line with local averages. The results are in line with those expected for pupils of similar schools.
- 288 A level results over the last three years are for very small entry numbers and cannot be compared meaningfully with national averages. However, in both the last two years A to E passes have been 100%. The results are across the range of grades and are in line with students' efforts and abilities.

## **Good features**

### **Key stages 3 and 4**

- 289 A majority of pupils across the age and ability ranges answer questions orally with clarity, understanding and accuracy.
- 290 They have a relatively sound knowledge of number, vulgar fractions, decimal fractions and percentages and the relationship between them.
- 291 They have spatial awareness and understand the concepts of the area of plane figures and volumes of regular solids using the appropriate units.
- 292 Most pupils use calculators accurately and appropriately.
- 293 Pupils with additional learning needs make good progress.

### **Key stage 3**

- 294 Y7 pupils, including those with additional learning needs, can use tally charts to collect and organise data and represent it graphically, using bar charts and pictograms.
- 295 Most Y7 and Y8 pupils understand angle properties on a straight line, about a point and with parallel lines. They can use this knowledge to answer appropriate problems.
- 296 Y8 pupils have a sound knowledge of simple algebraic techniques.
- 297 The more able students in Y9 have a good understanding of basic probability and can calculate probabilities using tree diagrams.
- 298 The less able pupils in Y9 can identify the use of percentages in everyday situations and are able to make simple calculations.

### **Key stage 4**

- 299 The good standard of coursework has contributed positively to the percentage of A\* to C passes.
- 300 More able pupils in both Y10 and Y11 have a sound understanding of linear, quadratic and cubic graphs. This has been achieved by either using graphical calculators or ICT.
- 301 A majority of less able students in Y11 have an understanding of the rotation of geometric shapes about a given point.
- 302 Less able pupils in Y10 can apply their knowledge of the enlargement of geometric shapes with given scale factors to problems.
- 303 Pupils with additional learning needs in Y10 can use data, including the necessary calculations, to draw pictograms and pie charts.

### **Post 16**

- 304 Y13 students have a good understanding of a range of concepts in pure mathematics and mechanics or statistics. They can adapt this knowledge to solve appropriate questions.
- 305 Y12 students are making sound progress in understanding the basic concepts of pure mathematics and mechanics or statistics.

### **Shortcomings**

#### **Key stages 3 and 4**

- 306 Lower ability pupils do not present their work in a neat, logical way.
- 307 They do not always complete their work or correct work that is wrong.
- 308 In a minority of classes in the lower ability ranges, the more able pupils are not always challenged in lessons and do not achieve their potential.
- 309 A small minority of pupils lack confidence in their mathematical abilities.
- 310 In a minority of classes, the learning of pupils is adversely affected by the behaviour of a small number of pupils.

#### **Key stage 4**

- 311 A minority of students have difficulty in maintaining concentration during lessons. As a result, they are unable to attempt the task set without further help from the teacher.

### **Post 16**

- 312 In Y12, a very small number of students lack the knowledge of certain basic algebraic techniques and this can slow the rate of progress.

<b>History</b>
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Key stage 3:	Grade 3	Good features outweigh shortcomings
Key stage 4:	Grade 3	Good features outweigh shortcomings
Post 16:	Grade 2	Good features and no important shortcomings

- 313 Standards of achievement at GCSE have been below the local and national averages for the last two years.
- 314 Standards at post 16 are good. Students achieve results which are in line with the local averages and above the Wales average for grades A to C at A level.

### **Good features**

#### **Key stages 3 and 4**

- 315 Pupils have secure levels of knowledge and understanding of the topics they study. They recall their previous learning successfully and use subject-specific vocabulary accurately and in the appropriate context.

- 316 Pupils have a good understanding of chronology and can apply their knowledge and understanding to enable them to evaluate a variety of sources of evidence.
- 317 They make good progress in developing their investigative and problem-solving skills. They ask appropriate questions of primary and secondary sources of evidence, and can extract relevant information from a range of sources and texts. Pupils are developing secure skills of historical enquiry.
- 318 The majority of pupils succeed in testing the sources of evidence for reliability, utility and bias. They are aware of the operation of propaganda and can explain its causes and effects. Most pupils use the sources of evidence effectively to construct balanced and logical arguments in their written and oral work.
- 319 Above average, and most average ability pupils can successfully compare and contrast differing interpretations of historical developments. They make good progress in identifying and explaining the causes of change over time.
- 320 Pupils have a secure knowledge and understanding of the history and culture of Wales, and particularly, of the unique historical development of their local community.

### **Key stage 3**

- 321 By Y9, the majority of pupils can distinguish between the long-term and the short-term causes of historical change over time.
- 322 Most pupils are successful in developing their skills in the selection, organisation and communication of information in oral and written tasks. There are good examples of extended writing in the books of a significant number of pupils.
- 323 Above average and most average ability pupils in Y9 make good, and sometimes very good, progress in discussion work in class.
- 324 Pupils in Y7 make good progress in recognising the distinctive attitudes which different cultures encourage. They are successful in being able to identify the worthwhile moral values which the studied societies produce.
- 325 Pupils with additional learning needs make good progress in acquiring the key historical skills, in line with their abilities. Their recall of previous learning and ability to extract information from sources of evidence is secure.

### **Key stage 4**

- 326 Most pupils approach the demands to consider historical problems with greater maturity and depth of response.
- 327 Many pupils continue to make good progress in their oral skills. Contributions to class discussions are articulate and allow pupils to gain confidence.
- 328 Pupils can provide appropriate explanations for the attitudes and motivation of people in the past by asking more searching questions of the sources of evidence.
- 329 The written work of the majority of pupils is appropriately organised and presented. These pupils show progression in their extended writing skills. Some of these pupils

develop their research and independent learning skills which improves the quality of their writing in their coursework.

### **Post 16**

- 330 Students have good levels of knowledge and understanding of the historical debates surrounding the outbreak of the First World War and of the rise of fascism in Nazi Germany in the 1930's.
- 331 Students have good, and sometimes very good, oral skills. Extended responses to challenges and questions are often fluent and convincing.
- 332 Students make good progress in mastering the historiography of the periods they are studying. They are increasingly confident in identifying and explaining the differences in interpretation found in the work of academic experts in these areas.
- 333 Students ask more complex questions of sources of evidence. They are clear in their recognition of the operation of bias and propaganda. Most use their developing analytical skills effectively to adopt an evaluative and critical approach to the problems they are considering. They have a good ability to pick up clues from the attributions of the sources which they evaluate.
- 334 Most students produce well argued, carefully balanced essays and source evaluations. They show good skills in selecting and organising the material which they use to respond to the challenging problems they are required to consider.
- 335 The majority of students show a good development of extended writing skills. They show a good awareness of the need to consider all aspects of a problem and to use their analytical and critical skills to construct a well balanced argument.

### **Shortcomings**

#### **Key stage 3 and 4**

- 336 There are significant variations in the standards of written work produced by a minority of pupils. Some do not complete their written tasks regularly; this has an impact upon their progress. Their standards of spelling, punctuation and use of language are underdeveloped.
- 337 A significant minority of pupils do not include sufficient detail in their written responses to tasks and challenges. They do not produce work of sufficient depth and analysis to clarify the argument which they seek to make. Some difficulties with source evaluation and interpretation hinder them from fully explaining the historical significance of the points which they make in their arguments.
- 338 A lack of confidence in presenting an extended oral response to questioning in lessons hinders the progress of a minority of pupils.

### **Post 16**

- 339 A small number of students continue to find source evaluation difficult. As a result, their written work lacks the depth and insight to enable them to present a balanced and convincing argument. These students do not provide enough examples to strengthen the points which they make.

## Geography

Key stage 3:	Grade 2:	Good features and no important shortcomings
Key stage 4:	Grade 2:	Good features and no important shortcomings
Post 16:	Grade 2:	Good features and no important shortcomings

340 GCSE results in the last three years are below national averages for grades at A\* to C. These results are broadly in line with pupils' prior attainment.

341 AS and A level results are below national averages for grades A to E and represent satisfactory achievement for students.

### Good features

#### Key stage 3

342 Pupils make good progress relative to their previous attainment.

343 Pupils have a secure knowledge of the hydrological cycle and features associated with rivers. They recall and use appropriate geographical vocabulary to describe water processes and river features.

344 Pupils with additional learning needs in Y9 complete work to a good standard in relation to their prior attainment. They understand and use appropriate terminology to describe accurately the geographical characteristics of Antarctica.

345 Y9 pupils understand the relationship between people and their environments. They confidently discuss and analyse the impact of tourism and changing global conditions on Antarctica's fragile environment.

346 Pupils across the key stage develop a good range of geographical skills. They use maps, data, atlases and visual images with confidence. Their analytical skills are reinforced by appropriate and relevant fieldwork enquiry.

347 Pupils show good ICT skills which they use in the presentation of their folio enquiry studies. Pupils illustrate extensive knowledge and understanding of the topics studied.

#### Key stage 4

348 Pupils in Y10 show a good awareness and understanding of the social and economic impact associated with the changing industrial pattern of South Wales.

349 Y11 pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the processes at work during the formation of glacial landscapes. They confidently describe specific glacial features, such as troughs, cwms and arêtes with accurate terminology.

350 The pupils' skills of enquiry, observation and evaluation are well developed. These skills are applied with accuracy in their coursework studies.

351 Pupils show an increasing understanding of patterns and processes in human geography. They are aware of the global issues associated with sustainable development.

### **Post 16**

- 352 Students in Y12 show a good knowledge and awareness of the reasons and consequences of urban sprawl. They use the case study of Cardiff to explore spatial theories and reinforce their understanding of land use.
- 353 Y13 students recall and apply population growth theories to China with confidence. They effectively analyse the strategies used to limit or reverse present birth rate patterns and explore the social, moral and economic implications.
- 354 Students make use of assignments and projects to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding of topics studied.
- 355 Students use a range of geographical skills and techniques to complete class tasks and coursework assignments. Students use good analysis, interpretive evaluation and presentation skills to produce good quality studies of retail shopping and land use in Merthyr Tydfil.
- 356 Students recall and use relevant geographical terminology with increasing precision.

### **Shortcomings**

#### **Key stage 3**

- 357 Pupils show a limited knowledge or understanding of the relationship between climate and natural vegetation around the world.
- 358 The off task behaviour of a small minority of pupils has a detrimental effect on the standards they achieve.

#### **Key stage 4**

- 359 The quality of the written work of a few pupils is not of an adequate standard relative to their ability.
- 360 A few pupils lack the appropriate vocabulary to describe geographical features and processes accurately.

### **Post 16**

- 361 A few students show a lack of detail and depth in classroom discussion and their personal notes.

<b>Music</b>
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Key stage 3:	Grade 3	Good features outweigh shortcomings
Key stage 4:	Grade 3	Good features outweigh shortcomings
Post 16:	Grade 3	Good features outweigh shortcomings

- 362 GCSE results in the last two years have been well below the national averages for grades at A\* to C and A\*/A. In 2006 results were slightly higher than those for the UA, but in 2007 they were below. The difference between the attainment of boys and girls has been much higher than that for the UA and Wales.

363 Over the last two years, the percentage of students who have gained grades A to C at A level has been much higher than for the UA. It was higher than the average for Wales in 2006 but well below in 2007. The number of students who sat the examinations has been very low, so judgements based on these results carry little weight.

### **Good features**

#### **Key stage 3**

364 Pupils sing with enthusiasm and, in general, secure intonation. Most pupils, including those with additional learning needs, perform melodies individually on a variety of instruments with a good degree of accuracy. More able pupils maintain good ensemble in group and whole class performance.

365 In a few group "Toy Box" and "Seasons" sound picture compositions, pupils in Y7 and Y8 combine sounds and motifs imaginatively. Improvisations, based on the "Blues" structure, by more able pupils in Y9 often have a sense of style and are rhythmically and melodically convincing.

366 Most pupils when appraising, including those with additional learning needs, are able to identify instruments, voices and basic musical features in different recorded extracts. A few more able pupils make perceptive comments.

#### **Key stage 4**

367 A small majority of pupils make good progress in vocal and instrumental performing. They perform confidently with a good sense of style.

368 In general, work in progress for the "Special Event" compositions in Y10 and Y11 shows an understanding of basic chords and sometimes, interesting treatment of ideas. A few compositions are very imaginative and convincing and demonstrate effective use of ICT in the layering of parts.

369 More able pupils can identify technical and expressive features well when appraising music from different styles and periods.

#### **Post 16**

370 Most students perform vocally and instrumentally with confidence and a good sense of style.

371 Initial ideas in some Ground Bass compositions in Y12 and those using "Minimalism" techniques in Y13 display a basic understanding of the respective styles.

372 Students have a sound basic knowledge and understanding of their areas of study.

### **Shortcomings**

#### **Key stage 3**

373 At times, the quality of singing lacks adequate refinement. Some middle and lower ability pupils are less secure when performing together in group performance.

374 Some group compositions and improvisations lack coherence and are limited in musical interest.

375 Comments made by many pupils when appraising are often brief and sometimes superficial. In general, pupils have limited experience of appraising their own and their peers' practical work.

#### **Key stage 4**

376 A few pupils lack confidence when performing due to insecure skills.

377 A small minority of pupils have difficulty in making progress in composing without the support of the teacher. Several compositions have not been adequately developed.

378 The appraising skills of a significant minority of middle and lower ability pupils are uneven. They are good in certain tasks but insecure in others.

#### **Post 16**

379 The performances of a few students though accurate, lack conviction.

380 Some compositions require further refinement. A few students find it difficult to develop ideas without the support of the teacher.

381 Y12 students have not yet started drafting their coursework essays. The stylistic analysis skills of a few students are not sufficiently developed.

### **Religious education (including religious studies)**

Key stage 3:	Grade 1	Good with outstanding features
Key stage 4:	Grade 1	Good with outstanding features
Post 16:	Grade 2	Good features and no important shortcomings

382 The proportion of learners gaining GCSE grades A\* to C is substantially higher than the averages for both the UA and the whole of Wales.

383 At A level, all students achieve grades A\* to C.

384 The number of pupils and students who sit the examinations is relatively low, although the numbers following the courses this year are substantially higher.

#### **Good and outstanding features**

##### **Key stage 3**

385 Pupils have an outstanding factual knowledge and understanding of the units of work studied.

386 Less able pupils also achieve outstanding standards. They have outstanding knowledge of key terms and can organise and present factual information about religious events and belief to a high standard.

387 Pupils know how and why believers worship. The school's 'House of Religion' reinforces and deepens their knowledge of the ways believers celebrate their faiths.

388 In class discussion, pupils are confident and express their opinion clearly. They are willing to express an opinion and the more able expand on their comments substantially.

389 They are developing outstanding knowledge of the authority that believers ascribe to religious texts, and to the key figures both in the history of religions and in contemporary faith communities.

#### **Key stage 4**

390 Pupils have outstanding factual knowledge and understanding of the courses they follow. They have an outstanding understanding of how Christian traditions provide a basis for spiritual, moral and social values within the communities that believers live in. They are able to recall religious factual information from previous learning and apply the knowledge to different contexts.

391 They have an outstanding understanding of why religions raise moral and social questions within different communities. In responding to these, they show respect for people's beliefs that differ from their own.

392 They show outstanding knowledge and understanding of human rights issues that are raised by their experience of the natural world and human relationships.

393 Pupils can recognise technical terms in religion and can explain their meaning both orally and in their written work.

394 Pupils with additional learning needs have good knowledge of religious practice and all are successful in gaining an entry level accreditation at the end of key stage 4.

#### **Good features**

##### **Post 16**

395 Students have good levels of background knowledge and are able to express their views confidently.

396 Oral discussions in lessons are articulate, fluent and well informed. Students are confident in engaging with each other in evaluating and understanding complex religious issues.

397 Students have very good understanding of the importance of the Torah to Jewish believers and how it influences their view of the creation and the covenant.

398 Written work is well planned, with key facts presented with accuracy and relevance, together with good evaluation and evidence or examples where appropriate. In the work of more able students, the depth of their analysis and source evaluation is outstanding.

#### **Shortcomings**

##### **Post 16**

399 A minority of students are reluctant to engage in class discussion, to offer personal views or to use independent thought to evaluate the issues and topics discussed.

## **School's response to the inspection**

The inspection findings recognise that there are many positive aspects of the school, some of which are outstanding. We are pleased that the inspectors found that a significant strength of the school is the success with which it ensures the well being of its pupils, creating a happy and caring community. The report notes that the emphasis the school places on fostering respect, consideration of others and responsible behaviour is apparent in its life and daily organisation. In particular, the school has outstanding measures to eliminate any bullying or harassment and that it creates a climate where discrimination or unpleasantness of any sort will not be tolerated.

The report indicates the progress made in those areas identified for improvement in the previous report and it emphasises that since the last inspection the school has made outstanding progress in raising attendance.

There are good, constructive relationships between teachers and pupils, which are particularly noticeable in the sixth form. We are pleased that it is recognised that senior students confidently contribute to the life of the school and that a wide range of opportunities is provided for students to develop as fully rounded individuals. The expertise and dedication of teachers and the valuable contribution that all the non-teaching staff make to the smooth running of the school are duly acknowledged.

The report states that overall the curriculum offers balance, breadth, flexibility, cohesion and progression and we are pleased that it acknowledges that the school has effectively introduced additional learning pathways for pupils. It is also recognised that many learning and social experiences are enriched by a good range of extra curricular activities offered to pupils. Furthermore, there are effective partnerships with parents, the community, education providers and other institutions that provide good support for learning. The good knowledge and understanding of governors, their role in strategic planning and their positive contribution to the school are all duly acknowledged.

An action plan will be put in place to address the recommendations in the report. Improving the quality of teaching and learning, developing further a more consistent, rigorous approach to monitoring and self-evaluation and improving marking and assessment are developments that we believe we can confidently address. Indeed, aspects of these recommendations are already included in our current school development plan. We will also ensure that as a school we place greater emphasis on the other three recommendations. Hence, we will increase the opportunities for pupils, who are not following the full GCSE course, to gain accreditation in Welsh in key stage 4. We will also improve the promotion of both bilingualism and the Cwricwlwm Cymreig and address the opportunities for participation in a daily act of collective worship. Pleasingly, inspectors identified many elements and procedures in the school that will help us to address some shortcomings by sharing good practice more widely.

## Appendix 1

### Basic information about the school

Name of school	Afon Taf High School
School type	Secondary
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Address of school	Yew Street, Troedyrhiw, Merthyr Tydfil.
Postcode	CF48 4ED
Telephone number	01443 690401

Headteacher	Mr. M.W.Johns
Date of appointment	27/04/98
Chair of governors / Appropriate authority	Mr. J. Acreman
Reporting inspector	Mr. T.A. O'Marah
Dates of inspection	28 Jan 2008 to 31 Jan 2008

## Appendix 2

### School data and indicators

Year group	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13	Total
Number of pupils	170	184	205	206	191	65	66	1087

Total number of teachers			
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time equivalent (fte)
Number of teachers	68	5	70.93

Staffing information	
Pupil: teacher (fte) ratio (excluding special classes)	15.3:1
Average teaching group size	20.1
Overall contact ratio (percentage)	76.3

Percentage attendance for three complete terms prior to the inspection								
	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13	Whole school
Term 1	93.5	91.4	89.3	93.2	89.3	94.2	93.9	91.5
Term 2	93.0	92.5	90.4	92.6	90.7	94.0	95.3	92.2
Term 3	91.2	90.5	88.2	91.2	96.0	95.3	98.9	91.8

Percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals	24
Number of pupils excluded during 12 months prior to inspection	66

## Appendix 3

### National Curriculum Assessment Results End of key stage 3:

National Curriculum Assessment KS3 results 2007													
Total number of pupils in Y9: 206													
Percentage of pupils at each level													
			N	D	W	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
English	Teacher assessment	School	0	0	0	0	1.4	7.7	26.9	33.7	25.0	5.3	0
		National	0.7	0.2	0.4	0.3	1.5	7.4	21.6	35.8	23.9	8.0	0.2
Mathematics	Teacher assessment	School	0	0	0	0	3.4	13.5	26.0	27.9	20.7	8.7	0
		National	0.6	0.2	0.3	0.3	1.1	7.4	18.4	25.0	30.4	15.7	0.6
Science	Teacher assessment	School	0.5	0	0	0	0	10.6	34.1	36.1	14.9	3.8	0
		National	0.8	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.5	6.0	18.8	34.1	27.6	11.5	0.1

N Not awarded a level for reasons other than disapplication.  
D Disapplied under Section 364-367 of the Education Act 1996.  
W Pupils who are working towards level 1

Percentage of pupils attaining at least level 5 in mathematics, science and either English or Welsh (first language) by teacher assessment	
In the school	43.3
In Wales	58.2

## Public Examination Results:

<b>For pupils aged 15, results in GCSE, Entry Level Qualification, GNVQ and NVQ</b>	
Number of pupils aged 15 on the school roll in January 2007	198
Average GCSE or GNVQ points score per pupil	32

<b>The percentage of 15 year old pupils who in 20__:</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>UA</b>	<b>Wales</b>
entered for 5 or more GCSEs or equivalent	87	82	87
attained at least 5 GCSE grades A* to C, the equivalent vocational qualifications or a combination of both	37	41	54
attained at least 5 GCSE grades A* to G, the equivalent vocational qualifications or a combination of both	84	80	86
attained GCSE grades A*-C in each of mathematics, science, English or Welsh first language (the core subject indicator)	23	28	40
entered at least one Entry level qualification, GCSE short course or GCSE	97	98	98
attained one or more GCSE grades A*-C or the vocational qualification equivalent	69	66	77
attained one or more GCSE grades A*-G or the vocational qualification equivalent	91	90	93
attained no graded GCSE or the vocational qualification equivalent	9	10	7
attained one or more Entry level qualification only	3	6	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	-	-	-

<b>For pupils aged 17, results in A/AS, GNVQs and NVQs</b>	
Number of pupils aged 17 in January 2007	58
Number of pupils entered for 2 or more GCE A level examinations or equivalent in 2007	50
Number of pupils entered for fewer than 2 GCE A levels or equivalent in 2007	8

Report by Terence Andrew O'Marah  
Afon Taf High School, 28/01/08

	<b>School</b>	<b>UA</b>	<b>Wales</b>
Percentage of pupils entered who achieved 2 or more grades A-C	60	58	67
Percentage of pupils entered who achieved 2 or more grades A-E	96	96	94
Average points score per candidate entering 2 or more subjects	17	17	20

UA Unitary Authority

## Appendix 4

### **Evidence base of the inspection**

A team of 14 inspectors, including the school's nominee, spent four days in the school.

Prior to the inspection, full discussions were held at the school, between the registered inspector and the headteacher, based on the school's self-evaluation report.

The registered inspector held meetings with staff, governors and parents (22 parents attended) prior to the inspection.

172 lessons were seen, of which 75 were in the six subjects that were inspected in detail. All teachers were observed taking lessons. Three assemblies and 19 registration periods were attended.

Inspectors interviewed members of the leadership team, learning managers, student development managers and other staff with whole school responsibilities, including members of the non-teaching staff.

Pupils' work was scrutinised, both as part of a structured cross-curricular book review, and within lessons.

Inspectors held formal discussions with groups of pupils from each year group and with the School Council. They also talked to many pupils informally.

58 parents returned a questionnaire sent out by the school prior to the inspection.

Comprehensive documentation, including the school's self-evaluation report, was scrutinised before and during the inspection.

## Appendix 5

### Composition and responsibilities of the inspection team

Team Member	Responsibilities
Terry O'Marah	Registered inspector: Key Questions 1, 5 and 6.
Mike Snow	Lay inspector: behaviour; attendance; community; work-related education; governors.
Glyn Davies	Core Team: Key Questions 2 and 3; Post 16; general observations
Lyn Bithell	Core Team: Key Question 2 (Assessment); literacy; personal and social education; general observations.
Alan Edwards	<b>Mathematics</b> ; Core Team: Key Question 7; numeracy.
Heddwyn Evans	<b>Religious education</b> ; Core Team: key question 4; spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
Colin Rees	<b>Welsh (Second language)</b> Bilingualism;
Alan Jones	<b>Music.</b>
Anne Newman	<b>History.</b>
John Radford	<b>Geography.</b>
Selwyn Gale	General observation; information and communications technology.
Martyn Williams	General observations.
Keith Davies	General observations.
Margaret Herbert	General observations; wider key skills.
Cliff Smith	School's Nominee

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### Acknowledgement

The registered inspector and his team wish to thank the governors, teachers and pupils of the school for their co-operation, tolerance and help during the inspection.