

REPORT

on the

**INSPECTION UNDER SECTION 10 OF
THE SCHOOL INSPECTION ACT 1996**

**ARGOED HIGH SCHOOL
BRYN ROAD
BRYN-Y-BAAL
NR MOLD
FLINTSHIRE
CH7 6RY**

School Number: 664/4042

Date of Inspection: 6 – 9 May 2003

By

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Registered Inspector W098/3292

Under Estyn contract number: T/34/02

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CURRICULUM NOMENCLATURE AND KEY STAGES

A new nomenclature to describe pupils' progress through school was introduced in 1989. This system of numbering year groups from the start of compulsory schooling to age 18 is intended to ease communication among schools, governing bodies, parents and LEAs and emphasise the importance of continuity.

The term "Reception" (R) is applied to the year group of pupils in a primary school (not a nursery class) who attain the age of 5 during the academic year "Year 1" (Y1) is applied to the year group of pupils who attain the age of 6 during the academic year and so on to Y13 the year group who attain the age of 18 during the academic year:

	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13
Years	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18

Key stage 1 of the national curriculum consists of Y1 and Y2; KS2 of Y3 to Y6; KS3 of Y7 to Y9; KS4 of Y10 and Y11 (which is the final year of compulsory education).

GRADE DESCRIPTIONS

The five-point grading scale used to represent the main judgements in this report is as follows:

1. Very good: many good features, some of them outstanding.
2. Good: good features and no major shortcomings.
3. Satisfactory: good features outweigh shortcomings.
4. Unsatisfactory: some satisfactory work but shortcomings in important areas.
5. Poor: many shortcomings.

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1. CONTEXT

The school and its priorities

Argoed is an 11-16 mixed comprehensive school built in 1978, which mainly serves its close catchment of predominantly private housing estates in the pleasant semi-rural areas of Bryny-Baal, Mynydd Isa, New Brighton and neighbouring villages. Virtually all pupils come from homes where English is the dominant language. The proportion of pupils who come from ethnic minority groups is below two per cent.

The 566 pupils, with even numbers of boys and girls on roll, has risen by 90 since the previous inspection. The school is popular and over-subscribed. Its official accommodation figure, including temporary accommodation, of 528 is exceeded. Continuing building of new family homes in the immediate vicinity is resulting in reviews of the school's traditional catchment.

Pupils are drawn from the full range of economic and social backgrounds. Most parents are in employment and commute to surrounding areas. Most pupils are from neither prosperous nor financially disadvantaged homes. Approximately 3% are known to be eligible for free school meals, compared with the Welsh average of 22%.

The intake is fully comprehensive, although it contains a relatively high proportion of pupils of average ability and above. Thirty one pupils have statements of special educational need. A further 37 are on the school's register of special educational needs. The school houses two UA funded special units for speech and language and for Aspergers Syndrome. Although Argoed is Flintshire's only 11-16 school, the proportion of pupils choosing to transfer to full-time education beyond the age of 16, at well over 80%, is high and compares very favourably with 11-18 schools with similar intakes. Currently there are representations about the school's size and designation.

The school's motto, 'succeeding together' and aim 'to provide a first-class education for our children in a secure, calm, enjoyable and stimulating atmosphere' are translated into action through its succinctly published statements of vision and ethos, the detail of the current school development plan and the headings of the five-year development plan.

2. MAIN FINDINGS

The main findings of the report

- Argoed is a successful school which maintains high standards of academic and extra-curricular achievement and enjoys a well-deserved good reputation. It is supported by pupils and parents in its aim of providing a stimulating and civilised environment in which pupils can develop their knowledge and learning skills.
- Standards achieved by pupils, based on ability, are at least satisfactory in all classes observed and good or better in 75%. Very good standards are achieved in 11% of lessons

and these occur in each key stage. These figures exceed the targets set by the Welsh Assembly for the year 2002. (The standards of achievement in 95% of classes should be at least satisfactory and 50% good or better). Standards in each key stage are fairly even, with 74% in KS3 and 75% in KS4 classes good or very good. The proportion of good or better standards in classes in both key stages has risen significantly since the last inspection.

Subject	Key Stage 3	Key Stage 4
English	Good	Good
Mathematics	Good	Good
Science	Good	Good
Welsh	Good	Satisfactory
Design technology (DT)	Good	Good
Information technology (IT)	Good	Good
History	Good	Good
Geography	Good	Good
Modern foreign languages	Good	Good
Art	Satisfactory	Good
Music	Satisfactory	Good
Physical education (PE)	Good	Good
Physical education (GCSE)	-	Good
Religious education (RE)	Good	Very Good
Personal & social education (PSE)	Good	Good
Drama	Good	Good
Media studies	-	Good
Home economics – Food	-	Very Good
Home Economics – Child development	-	Very Good

- At the end of KS3 NC tests in 2002, the percentages of pupils achieving level 5 or above in English, mathematics and science, over 75% in each subject, were much higher than local and national figures and have improved steadily. The percentage of pupils gaining level 5 or above in all three subjects, the core subject indicator (CSI), was 61%, which is 11% higher than the national figure.
- GCSE results have also continued to improve since the last inspection, but with fluctuations in some years, as each pupil can represent over one per cent in the relatively small numbers in some cohorts. In 2002, 98% of pupils were entered for 5 or more subjects, a very high entry rate compared with local and national figures. The proportion gaining 5 or more A*-C grades, 67%, is above local and national figures. One sixth of grades awarded were at the highest A*/A grades. Five or more grades A*-G were achieved by all candidates, which is higher than local and national figures. The CSI, the proportion gaining grades A*-C in all three subjects, English, mathematics and science, 57%, is well above local and national figures. The average points score per pupil, 45, greatly exceeds the local and national figure of 39. Girls' performances at 5 or more A*-C grades, in common with national trends, were better than those of the boys, but by a lesser amount. Results demonstrate clear overall progress. Pupils of all ability make mainly good progress in all subjects across each key stage. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress across the curriculum.

- As each intake progresses through the school, tracking of scores on entry, results of tests at the end of KS3 and predicted and actual grades at the end of KS4, indicate that the school provides good added value and enhances pupils' achievements.
- Listening skills are very good across the curriculum. Speaking skills are good. Most pupils are articulate and confident. They express their opinions well and are courteous, even in disagreement.
- Reading skills are good and develop well. Pupils read aloud expressively. They can skim and scan. Research skills develop well. A good proportion read keenly for pleasure.
- Writing standards are good. Pupils produce well organised, presented and extended work which pays due attention to purpose and audience. Careful revision ensures good spelling, grammar and punctuation in final drafts.
- Standards in numeracy across the curriculum are satisfactory. Most departments have planned for its development in their schemes of work.
- Standards in IT are good. Its use is well developed in a range of subjects. Pupils develop good skills in communicating, handling and modelling information and confidently use a range of applications in their work.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

- The ethos of the school reflects a clear sense of shared values. It is a happy and caring community, where pupils can develop both as individuals and as group members.
- Pupils' spiritual development is good, and moral, social and cultural development are very good.
- Pupils have good opportunities in many subjects to reflect on experiences, develop their own opinions and learn to respect the beliefs of others. They gain an understanding by developing a sense of curiosity through reflection on people's lives, beliefs and the natural world.
- The quality of year group collective worship is good. On the days when pupils remain in their tutor groups there is a thought for the day.
- Moral issues are raised regularly. The school is successful in fostering an element of self-discipline, respect for others and responsibility. Pupils support a great number of charities. Moral issues concerning the environment are frequently discussed. Honest opinions are expressed in sensitive personal and social issues.
- Cooperation and social interaction between pupils are very good. The School Council provides good opportunities. Older pupils help younger counterparts. Across a range of activities, pupils take pride in representing the school in local and national events. Relationships overall are very good. Pupils from a number of different backgrounds and cultures as well as pupils with special educational needs are very well integrated into school life. Social behaviour is mature and considerate.
- Aspects of the curriculum foster European and international awareness. The Cwricwlwm Cymreig is planned effectively. Pupils' cultural development benefits greatly from extensive visits, field trips and extra-curricular events. Discussions in subjects promote pupils' understanding of racial harmony well. Numerous displays of visits, activities and pupils' success reflect the commitment of pupils and staff to the school's life and values.
- Attendance is good, averaging about 94%. High standards have been maintained.
- Standards of behaviour and attitudes towards learning throughout the school are consistently very good. These high standards make a positive contribution to standards of achievement and the prevailing quality of life and pleasant learning environment in the school.

Quality of education

- The quality of teaching is even more a strength of the school than at the time of the previous inspection. It contributes significantly to pupils' achievements. It was satisfactory or better in all classes observed and good or better in 77%. In 13% of classes there is teaching of very good quality. These high proportions of good and very good teaching occur equally in each key stage.
- This high proportion of good and very good teaching is well reflected in virtually all subjects across the school. This consistency reflects many transferable aspects of good practice.
- Teachers have very good, up-to-date knowledge, expertise and understanding of their subjects and examination requirements. Planning is detailed and thorough. The addition of learning targets in a majority of subjects provides a sharper focus.
- There is a clear ethos for work. Relationships throughout are very good. Classrooms are calm. Teaching is secure and controlled. Resources are chosen and used well.
- Pair and small group activity work is generally of high quality, although sometimes pupils do not have sufficient time or opportunities to discuss their ideas for themselves.
- All teachers play an active role in meeting the needs of higher attainers and pupils with SEN. Classroom support is used effectively to support teachers and pupils and this support is valued. Teachers tailor work and materials well for particular capabilities.
- Teachers employ an appropriate range of techniques and strategies. The best teaching inspires and enthuses pupils. Independent learning and initiative are often encouraged, but occasionally pupils are allowed to remain over-reliant on the teacher.
- Very good classroom displays and prompts reinforce the working environment.
- The school's policies for assessment, recording and reporting appropriately aim to highlight achievements and to further attainment and progress. Implementation of the policies is generally successful, with many examples of very good practice. The current school development plan rightly identifies the need for a more uniform approach to assessment procedures.
- Pupils' work is accurately marked. The best cases include helpful comments indicating specific strengths and weaknesses and indicate how to make further progress. Oral feedback is a strength.
- Good records are kept overall. All pupils are set three improvement targets as a result of the school's target-setting day. Mentoring interviews result in useful action plans. The process of building pupils' personal record takes place throughout the school. All these procedures make a good contribution to promoting higher standards.
- Parents receive one full report each year, plus two additional progress reports. Parents have an opportunity to respond to the reports and there is an appropriate programme of consultative meetings.
- Good use is made of available data to place pupils in ability bands or teaching sets and to monitor their progress as they move through the school and to identify those pupils who need extra support. Annual reviews are generally well used to evaluate attainment in departments.
- The quality and range of curricular provision overall for pupils of all abilities, including those with SEN, are good. It is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements. All pupils have equal access. There is very good provision for those pupils for whom the NC is modified or disapplied.

- At KS4 there is a good range of GCSE courses. The choices available are appropriate for the needs and abilities of all pupils. No vocational courses are offered currently, but plans are in place.
- Arrangements, content and delivery for teaching PSE are effective. Pupils value the course.
- Careers education and guidance are very effective. Work experience in Y11 is well managed and of good quality.
- Planning for the development of the key skills of communication and ICT across the curriculum is good. For numeracy it is satisfactory. Planning for the development of Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig and multicultural education is good. In several subjects it is very good.
- Although there is no prescribed timetable, homework is set regularly and extends and consolidates work done in class. All pupils have a homework planner.
- Pupils' learning is enriched through a popular, extensive programme of extra-curricular activities including music, dance, sport, subject clubs, trips and links with the community.
- The school offers a very good quality of support and guidance, linking pastoral and academic systems in principle and practice. It is successful in ensuring its aim of a positive atmosphere where teaching and learning can thrive.
- Very good child protection procedures are in place. Liaison with external agencies is good. The school takes good steps to ensure the welfare, health and safety of pupils. A few minor health and safety matters were passed to the school.
- Provision for pupils with SEN and the school's response to the new Code of Practice requirements are very good. The staff's knowledge of the pupils as individuals and their care for them are very good.
- The two UA resource provisions for pupils with statements for speech and language and Aspergers Syndrome are very good. For most of the teaching time the pupils are integrated into mainstream classes with the backing of experienced support.
- Partnerships with parents and community, schools and other institutions are very good. They make a very valuable contribution to the school's success and pupils' development. The school is outward looking, with an awareness of its responsibility both to its neighbouring and the wider community.
- Partnerships with industry are good and have been strengthened significantly since the last inspection. The range of practical links and educational visits is used effectively in many subjects.

Management

- The quality of self-evaluation and planning for improvement is very good. The school regards monitoring, review and self-evaluation as keys to its success and fundamental to its way of working. Development plans have clear targets to enable a constant focus on improvement. Leadership has a clear vision and understanding of the school's development. Development plans clearly identify short and longer term targets, which are closely monitored.
- Good practice is identified and shared.
- The school has a successfully developed, distinctive, positive ethos and culture emanating from its motto "succeeding together", its succinctly expressed aims and objectives and shared team sense, of purpose and vision, which it is successful in achieving.

- Governors are knowledgeable, fully informed and bring a wide range of expertise for the school's benefit. They are active and discharge their responsibilities well.
- The school is well and effectively managed overall. Planning is closely related to the detail and priorities of the good quality school development plan for the current year which is underpinned by the five year development plan.
- The headteacher provides clear vision and a sense of purpose. Her leadership has a positive and sustained impact. She is successful in bringing together the many disparate aspects of a school into a coherent whole. In this, she is well supported by her deputy, senior team and staff at all levels in the school.
- Each member of the senior team has specific personal responsibilities, including linking with and reviewing a cluster of subject departments, as well as corporate responsibilities. Departments are led by teachers who are clear about the direction their subject should take and their management responsibilities.
- Teaching and non-teaching staff at all levels in the school work well together. Communication is very good overall. The daily routine of the school is efficient.
- Financial management is very good. Close liaison with the relevant committees of the governing body ensures careful consideration of spending plans.
- Statutory requirements are met. The school gives good value for money.
- Teachers are well qualified. Many have been at the school for 10 years or more and have contributed to its record of high standards. Staff are fully involved in opportunities for continuous professional development which is well identified and appropriately matched to whole school needs, identified in the school development plan, departmental and personal needs.
- The school is well served by its non-teaching staff.
- Accommodation is mostly in good condition and is well maintained. Many beneficial improvements have been made since the last inspection although some significant shortcomings remain and provision is barely sufficient to meet the curricular and pastoral needs of an increasing pupil roll. Despite these, a very pleasant, purposeful learning environment has successfully been produced.
- Much attractive display is used to good effect to soften the harshness of the striking concrete building and to record pupils' work and experiences.
- The quality and range of learning resources are good. Most departments have been enabled to acquire an adequate level and range for good learning. The library has been enhanced and developed well as a Learning Resource Centre. Book stock is of good quality, although it falls well below the recommended 13 books per pupil ratio. The library is well managed by the librarian, is increasingly popular and well used by pupils, including at breaks and after school.
- ICT resources are good. The pupil:computer ratio of 6.5:1 is better than the Welsh average. Extensive booking is made of the resources in the suited areas.

Progress since the last inspection

The previous report identified seven issues. Progress has been made in addressing each issue. There has been very good progress in one issue. Progress has been good in five issues and satisfactory in one.

3. EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

3.1 Standards achieved in subjects and areas of learning

The standards achieved by pupils, based on ability, are at least satisfactory in all classes observed and good or better in 75%. Very good standards are achieved in 11% of lessons and these occur in each key stage. These figures exceed the targets set by the Welsh Assembly for the year 2002. (The standards of achievement in 95% of classes should be at least satisfactory and 50% good or better). Standards in each key stage are fairly even, with 74% in KS3 and 75% in KS4 classes good or very good. The proportion of good or better standards in classes in both key stages has risen significantly since the last inspection.

Subject	Key Stage 3	Key Stage 4
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Science	Good	Good
Welsh	Good	Satisfactory
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History	Good	Good
Geography	Good	Good
Modern foreign languages	Good	Good
Art	Satisfactory	Good
Music	Satisfactory	Good
Physical education (PE)	Good	Good
Physical education (GCSE)	-	Good
Religious education (RE)	Good	Very Good
Personal & social education (PSE)	Good	Good
Drama	Good	Good
Media studies	-	Good
Home economics - Food	-	Very Good
Home Economics – Child development	-	Very Good

At the end of KS3 NC tests in 2002, the percentages of pupils achieving level 5 or above in English, mathematics and science, over 75% in each subject, were much higher than local and national figures and have improved steadily. The percentage of pupils gaining level 5 or above in all three subjects, the core subject indicator (CSI), was 61%, which is 11% higher than the national figure.

GCSE results have also continued to improve since the last inspection, but with fluctuations in some years, as each pupil can represent over one per cent in the relatively small numbers in some cohorts. In 2002, 98% of pupils were entered for 5 or more subjects, a very high entry rate compared with local and national figures. The proportion gaining 5 or more A*-C grades, 67%, is above local and national figures. One sixth of grades awarded were at the highest A*/A grades. Five or more grades A*-G were achieved by all candidates, which is

higher than local and national figures. The CSI, the proportion gaining grades A*-C in all three subjects, English, mathematics and science, 57%, is well above local and national figures. The average points score per pupil, 45, greatly exceeds the local and national figure of 39. Girls' performances at 5 or more A*-C grades, in common with national trends were better than those of the boys, but by a lesser amount. Results demonstrate clear overall progress.

Pupils of all ability make mainly good progress in all subjects across each key stage. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress across the curriculum. As each intake progresses through the school, tracking of scores on entry, results of tests at the end of KS3 and predicted and actual grades at the end of KS4, indicate that the school provides good added value and enhances pupils' achievements.

3.2 Standards achieved in key skills across the curriculum

Standards of achievement in the key skills of literacy and IT are good. In numeracy they are satisfactory.

Literacy

Oral skills are good in all subjects of the curriculum. Most pupils are articulate and confident. They respond well and readily to teachers' questions. Many provide extended, thoughtful, perceptive contributions, using words carefully and specialist terminology and key words correctly. They ask pertinent questions and develop their ideas well through talk, with increasing clarity and maturity as they move through the school. Almost all argue their case and express their opinions well and are courteous, including in disagreement. When required, they negotiate, collaborate and productively work in pairs and groups. They do not interrupt. They contribute well to formal and informal discussions.

They listen very well to teachers, audio-visual resources and to each other. They respond appropriately demonstrating that they have understood what they have heard. Rarely do instructions need to be repeated.

Reading skills are good and develop well. Pupils read aloud accurately, expressively and fluently from a range of materials. They can skim, scan and compare sources for information, select what is relevant and organise their work. They experience a wide range of opportunities. Location and research skills develop appropriately in most subjects from worksheets, photocopies, text and reference books, CD Roms and the internet. The use of the library is increasingly well developed. A good proportion of pupils read keenly for pleasure.

Writing standards are good. In a full range of subjects, good opportunities are provided to develop pupils' skills. Pupils produce well organised and extended work, clearly understanding the need to consider purpose and audience. Work is well presented. They make notes. They learn to draft, edit and revise their work so that accuracy in spelling, layout and punctuation is generally good in final drafts.

Numeracy

Standards in numeracy across the curriculum are satisfactory. Although most departments have planned for the development of numeracy in their schemes of work the level of

implementation of those plans is inconsistent, and at present is not monitored. Consequently, while the work on numeracy in some departments is good, it is underdeveloped in others.

Among the departments that make positive contributions to the development of numeracy are science, geography, history and mathematics. In science, pupils use number accurately in calculations, including the use of formulae, draw graphs accurately, and are able to extract and use data from graphs. There is good use of graphs also in history, together with time lines and investigations involving statistical and census data. The geography department has a clear policy on numeracy, and pupils are required to handle number and statistics in all units of study, and to illustrate their results in a variety of ways. The mathematics department is involved in strategies to improve the pupils' mental mathematical skills.

The school has already taken steps to develop the promotion of numeracy across the curriculum by recently conducting an audit of departmental contributions. Its next step is to co-ordinate and monitor these contributions to ensure that all departments contribute to improving numeracy across the curriculum.

IT

IT is taught in subject areas across the curriculum and, as a result, there are no discrete IT lessons. This approach has a clear structure and is well organised. Pupils are turning naturally to IT as a basic tool for use in their subjects.

In KS3, standards of achievement are satisfactory in English, Welsh, music, DT and drama. They are unsatisfactory in art. In all other subjects they are good. Pupils develop good skills in communicating, handling and modelling information.

In KS4, standards of achievement are mainly good in all subjects. Pupils confidently use a range of applications in their work. These include word processing, desktop publishing, presentations, video work, measurement, CAD / CAM and research using the internet and CD-Roms. Pupils also use appropriate subject specific software packages successfully.

4. ETHOS OF THE SCHOOL

4.1 Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

The ethos of the school reflects a clear sense of shared values. It is a happy and caring community in which pupils can develop both as individuals and as group members. Pupils' spiritual development is good, and moral, social and cultural development very good.

Pupils develop spiritual awareness through the collective act of worship, thought for the day, religious education and many other subjects across the curriculum. They have good opportunities, in many subjects, to reflect on experiences, develop their own opinions, and learn to respect the beliefs of others. In some subjects such as art and English pupils develop a sense of curiosity through reflection on people's lives, beliefs and the natural world. The quality of the year group collective worship is good. Pupils are attentive and respectful and staff use the occasion to celebrate pupils' achievements and reinforce a sense of belonging. Links with local churches and Christian groups help to enrich some services. On the days

when pupils remain in their tutor groups there is a thought for the day. Many of these are of good quality but others are brief and provide little time for pupils to reflect.

Moral issues are raised regularly in acts of collective worship, in the form groups' thoughts for the day, in personal and social education, in religious education and NC subjects. The school is very successful in fostering in the pupils an element of self-discipline, respect for others and responsibility. Through their support for a great number of local and national charities, the pupils display a sense of responsibility towards others. Pupils have a clear sense of right and wrong. They show respect for each other, their teachers, visitors to the school and for the school's environment and resources. Moral issues concerning the environment are frequently discussed in geography, science and the School Council, as well as in other subjects. Pupils are honest when expressing opinion on sensitive, personal and social issues.

The standard of co-operation and social interaction between pupils is very good. The School Council provides very good opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and contribute to the social life of the school. Pupils in Y11 provide their younger counterparts with good support through activities such as the Buddies Reading Scheme and the prefect system. Across a whole range of activities, pupils take pride in representing the school at local and national events. Relationships throughout the school are very good. Pupils are confident and self-disciplined. They work effectively in lessons in pairs and groups. Those who take part in extra-curricular activities, such as sport, drama and music, mix very well socially and work productively together across the age range. Pupils from a number of different backgrounds and cultures as well as pupils with special educational needs are very well integrated into school life.

Aspects of the curriculum foster European and international awareness in the pupils. There are regular educational visits to France, good e-mail links with a school in Germany and numerous opportunities to visit different countries outside Wales. The Cwricwlwm Cymreig is planned effectively across the subjects of the curriculum. Pupils benefit from visits to the theatre linked with Welsh, English and drama, and from field trips locally and further afield in science and geography. A very good number of extra-curricular events, including Urdd activities, sports, concerts, eisteddfod and visits to religious buildings also make a very good contribution to pupils' cultural development. Appropriate policies for multi-cultural awareness and racial equality have been adopted. Discussions in individual subjects such as history and religious education promote pupils' understanding of racial harmony well. The numerous notice boards around the school record visits, activities and pupils' success. They reflect the commitment of pupils and staff to the life and values of the school.

4.2 Behaviour and attitudes

Standards of behaviour throughout the school are consistently very good. High standards make a positive contribution to standards of achievement and the quality of life in school.

Policies, strategies and procedures are firmly established and are well understood. They are implemented consistently and effectively. The school achieves its aims through a well-organised and well-monitored integrated pastoral system. The leadership team, teaching and support staff are very conscientious in sustaining very good standards of behaviour throughout the school. There is a positive attitude towards the importance of education which results in a confident and very pleasant learning environment

Pupils' attitudes towards learning are very good apart from a very few pupils in KS4. Pupils are well motivated and apply themselves well to their tasks; they respond well to the strong leadership. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good, with a prevailing spirit of partnership. Pupils are aware of high expectations of behaviour and the overwhelming majority come to school to learn in an orderly and purposeful environment. As a result, their positive attitudes and behaviour enable the teachers to devote their time to teaching.

The merit system continues to operate effectively and the school's anti-bullying policy and procedures are followed efficiently and correctly; pupils are confident that the school reacts promptly when allegations of bullying arise. There were no permanent exclusions in the year prior to inspection and the number of temporary suspensions was very low. Every effort is made to resolve problems and assist pupils facing difficulties and problems are identified quickly by the monitoring system.

The high standards of behaviour and attitudes are a strength of the school and they contribute to a purposeful ethos and an orderly and civilized community.

4.3 Attendance

Attendance is good. Average attendance over the three terms preceding the inspection was almost 94%. High standards have been maintained since the last inspection.

The registration system, lesson registers, procedures for following-up of absenteeism and overall monitoring of attendance matters are all efficient and effective. There is very good communication at all levels. The leadership team, heads of year and form tutors are conscientious in following up attendance and are ably supported by efficient administrative staff. Attendance registers meet statutory requirements.

The rate of unauthorised absence is low. Registers reveal a substantial element of this absence is due to holidays taken in term time although this practice by parents is strongly discouraged by the school. The school day operates efficiently and pupils attend lessons punctually. Good attendance is an established expectation. As a result pupils respond positively and the good standard of attendance has a beneficial effect on their achievement, quality of life and the school's overall ethos.

5. QUALITY OF EDUCATION

5.1 Teaching

The quality of teaching is even more a strength of the school than at the time of the previous inspection. The consistent good quality across virtually all subjects contributes significantly to pupils' achievements. It was satisfactory or better in all classes observed and good or better in 77%. These high proportions are similar in each key stage. These figures exceed the targets set by the Welsh Assembly for the year 2002, for there to be satisfactory or better teaching in 95% of classes and good or better in 50%. In 13% of classes there was teaching of very good quality and this occurs equally in each key stage.

The high proportion of good or very good teaching is reflected in virtually all subjects across the whole school. This consistency contains many transferable aspects of good practice. In all classrooms, there are relationships and trust of high quality between pupils and between pupils and teachers. Teachers work hard for pupils and show commitment. They have very good up-to-date knowledge, expertise and understanding of their subjects and examination requirements. Long-term planning is detailed and thorough. The addition of learning targets in a majority of subjects provides a sharper focus. The schemes of work are comprehensive and ensure progression. They include the contribution to key skills.

Classroom organisation and management are good and on occasion very good. There is a clear ethos for work. Teaching builds effectively on existing knowledge and understanding. Classrooms are calm. Teaching is secure and controlled. Lessons are well planned, ensuring that pupils know what is expected of them and they settle quickly to their work. Objectives are shared with pupils and reinforced at the end of the lesson to check how well they have been met. Resources are chosen and used well. Pair and small group activities are mainly used well to develop pupils' ideas, team, oral and negotiating skills. The quality of this work is high, but occasionally teachers' exposition is too long and pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to discuss their ideas for themselves. Teachers tailor work well to particular capabilities. High expectations are implicit and challenge is realistic. Suitable work is provided for higher attainers. All teachers play an active role in meeting the needs of pupils with SEN. Classroom support, where available, is used effectively to support teachers and pupils, and this support is valued. Great strides have been made in developing differentiated strategies and materials. In a range of subjects, teachers use high quality materials, produced by the school, to extend pupils of all abilities.

Teachers employ an appropriate range of strategies and techniques, which often acknowledge the many different ways and styles in which pupils learn. The best teaching enthuses and inspires pupils. Activities are well timed and pace is varied to maintain pupils' interest and understanding. Much skilful questioning probes, reinforces and extends understanding, although, on occasion, a few pupils are allowed to become passive or closed questioning restricts opportunities for pupils to give extended answers or to think for themselves. Independent learning and initiative are often encouraged but occasionally pupils are allowed to remain over-reliant on the teacher. Regular feedback, often oral, encourages and acknowledges achievement. In most classrooms, good display and prompts to learning reinforce the working environment.

5.2 Assessment, recording and reporting

The school's policies for assessment, recording and reporting appropriately aim to highlight achievements and to further pupils' attainments and progress. They set a clear framework for individual departments to develop their own detailed policies. Implementation of the assessment policy is generally successful, with many examples of good and very good practice. The current school development plan rightly identifies the need for more uniformity of assessment procedures and for even better use of data.

Pupils' work, including homework, is accurately marked using the whole school system. There is a variation in the quantity and quality of written comments on pupils' work. In the best cases, constructive and accurate marking includes helpful comments, indicating pupils' specific strengths and weaknesses, together with indications as to how to make further progress. Good and, in some cases, very good use is made of oral feedback, including praise

and encouragement. There is good practice in a number of departments where, for example, good use is made of pupils' self-assessments based on clear criteria and pupils are well aware of how to improve; portfolios of assessed work are well used to ensure accurate use of NC levels; regular formal assessments are well related to NC and examination criteria.

Individual teachers and departments keep complete and accurate records of pupils' work and progress. Good central records are kept. A record of core skills including pupils' efforts and attitudes to learning is used by form tutors and heads of year to identify any problems or underachievement. All pupils, together with their parents, have a 10-minute interview with their form tutor to set at least three targets for improvement. Tutors are given detailed guidelines on helping pupils with targets including those for the most able. Targets are reviewed later in the year. In Y11, mentoring interviews, with pupils identified as underachieving, result in useful action plans. All these procedures make a good general contribution to promoting higher standards. Assessment requirements for the NC and public examinations are all met.

Pupils with SEN have individual educational plans in line with the Code of Practice and teachers are well aware of pupils' special needs. Statements are reviewed annually with parental involvement.

The process of building a record of pupils' academic, social and personal progress takes place throughout the school. In KS3, pupils are responsible for keeping a record of their achievements. These are built upon in KS4 and the process is well linked with the tutorial, pastoral and assessment systems. The NRA documents contain appropriate sections on pupils' work experience, career action plans, academic and personal achievements. The high quality final documents are presented at a special function held in a local theatre.

Parents receive one full report each year plus two additional progress reports. The progress reports contain numerical grades (1-4) on the core skills mentioned above. The reports contain information on subjects. There is a variation in the way achievement is communicated. In the best practice, NC levels or examination grades are used across each attainment target in the subject. Comments generally include specific strengths together with indications as to how pupils can make further progress. Parents have an opportunity to respond to the reports in writing and there is an appropriate programme of consultative meetings. NC and external examination achievements are appropriately reported.

Good use is made of NC assessments, external examination results and other assessment data to place pupils in ability bands and to identify those pupils needing extra support. Data is well used to place pupils in appropriate sets and to monitor their progress as they move through the school. The school has appropriate examination targets but not all subject areas have individual pupil targets. Annual reviews and analysis of examination results, including interviews between heads of departments and the head teacher, are generally well used to evaluate attainment in departments and to monitor the equal opportunities policy.

5.3 Curriculum

Overall, curricular provision in both key stages is good and it meets the Welsh Assembly's recommendation of 25 hours teaching time per week.

At KS3, the curriculum is broad and balanced. It meets statutory requirements for the teaching of NC subjects and religious education. In addition all pupils study drama and PSE. ICT is taught in subjects across the curriculum, with an introductory skills-building programme in Y7. Specific subject requirements for ICT are fulfilled and pupils' learning well supported by its use. Pupils study French as their foreign language. In Y9 able linguists have the opportunity, additionally, to study German. There are appropriate banding and setting arrangements for teaching groups. All pupils have equal access to the curriculum. Pupils with special educational needs are very well integrated and supported and there is very good provision for those pupils for whom the NC is modified or disapplied. Curricular links with the contributory primary schools are very good.

At KS4, there is a good range of GCSE courses. All pupils study the statutory core subjects - English, mathematics, science, Welsh, physical education, PSE and religious education. In addition, pupils choose from four option columns – broadly, a language, a humanities subject, a practical/creative subject and a free choice. Guidance and counselling ensure that pupils follow a balanced programme. The choices available are appropriate for the needs and abilities of pupils and include new subjects such as media studies, food studies and child care. All pupils follow the GCSE short course in Welsh but can also opt for the full course and able linguists can take both French and German. The provision for religious education enables pupils to undertake the short GCSE course, but there is no full GCSE option. No vocational courses are offered currently but plans are in place to introduce a double award GCSE in applied ICT in the next academic year. Although ICT is not offered in the options, pupils have the opportunity to gain certification through an extra-curricular course. There is good provision for pupils with SEN, whose fourth option choice is a life skills course.

At the end of KS4 the great majority of pupils go on to further study in local post-16 education provision. The school has no sixth form, but it is seeking to develop some post-16 education opportunities for its students, to ensure continuity. A partnership has been established with a neighbouring high school to develop post-16 experience in performing arts and French, which has worked well in its pilot year.

Twenty-one pupils are disapplied from the NC. They receive appropriate alternative provision in the form of individual support for literacy, numeracy and, in KS4, life skills development.

Arrangements for teaching PSE are effective. Pupils value the course, which is based on Welsh Assembly guidelines and includes elements relating to personal, social, emotional, health and careers education. All pupils have a timetabled lesson every two weeks. Talks by visiting speakers complement many aspects of the work undertaken during the year.

The careers education and guidance programme follows the Welsh Assembly framework for work-related education and is very effective. Y10 pupils have the opportunity to participate in a Young Enterprise activity. Work experience, which is timetabled for a week, early in Y11, is well-managed and of very good quality, contributing significantly to pupils' standards of achievement and the development of their key skills.

Planning for the development of the key skills of communication and ICT across the curriculum is good, although planning for the development of numeracy is only satisfactory. Planning for the development of Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig and multicultural education is good in the majority of subjects across the curriculum and very good in history, geography and

religious education. Subject schemes of work are detailed, cover NC requirements, provide good guidance for teaching and learning and continuity and progression between the key stages. Homework is set regularly, although there is no homework timetable, and provides opportunities for pupils to consolidate and extend their work. All pupils have a homework planner, which provides a useful means of communication between the school and parents.

An extensive programme of extra-curricular activities enhances the good curriculum provision. Pupils' learning is enriched and extended through a wide range of opportunities for music, drama, sport, subject clubs, trips and links with the community.

5.4 Support, guidance and pupils' welfare

The school offers a very good quality of support and guidance to pupils, linking pastoral and academic systems in principle and in practice. Because expected standards of behaviour and rules of discipline are clearly defined, it is successful in achieving its aim of ensuring a positive atmosphere where teaching and learning can thrive. Pupils speak very positively of the care given to them, and this is endorsed by parents.

Form tutors, heads of year, and heads of school play a prominent role in pupil support. Heads of school and year follow up any referral, from staff or others, sensitively and promptly. Form tutors are the pupils' initial source of support or help, and they feel confident that they can approach their tutors at any time. Since the last inspection, the role of the form tutor has been developed to include the monitoring of pupils' academic progress, and this is now effectively done. Subject teachers are also very supportive and approachable, giving freely of their time to aid pupils who are experiencing difficulties with their work.

Y9 pupils are given very good guidance on the choice of subjects to study in Y10 and Y11. There is very good guidance for Y11 pupils as they move on to sixth forms in other schools, to colleges of further education, or to employment. Another very good feature of the support and guidance given to pupils is the target-setting day, which the school arranges for a whole day every January. Pupils and their parents have interviews with staff to set individual targets for the coming year; this is good practice.

One lesson every two weeks is designated for the delivery of PSE by form tutors. The programme is well planned. The quality of the careers education programme is good, and makes appropriate use of the careers company and visiting speakers. However, a weakness identified in the previous inspection, that of not giving pupils sufficient practice in interview techniques, still remains an area to be developed. There is a comprehensive work experience programme for pupils in Y11. Appropriate placements are made, pupils are well prepared and monitored, and the process is evaluated when they return to school.

The headteacher undertakes the liaison required for child protection. Appropriate guidance on the policy exists for staff and the process follows UA guidelines. The school has a good policy to prevent bullying. Issues and strategies are discussed by the form tutors as part of the PSE programme. Parents and pupils expressed satisfaction that effective action is taken. Liaison with external agencies is good, particularly social services, ESW and the police. A nurse is on site for two mornings a week, and six members of the staff are qualified in first aid; they operate a rota of having one person on duty each day.

The school takes appropriate steps to ensure the welfare, health and safety of pupils in lessons, during intervals, in the dinner hour and on work experience and school visits.

5.5 Provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN)

The provision for pupils with SEN is very good and the school's response to the requirements of the new Code of Practice is very good. The staff's knowledge of the pupils as individuals and their care for them is very good.

Subject departments are responsible for preparing suitable work for pupils with SEN within their curricular field. There are very good links between subject teachers and SEN staff. In addition, a member of the Learning Support Team is allocated to each subject area. This is effective in developing expertise across the curriculum. The quality of co-operation is very good and across the curriculum there are good examples of tasks modified and suitable work prepared. At the end of KS4, pupils with SEN have good opportunities to gain outside accreditation and all achieve well.

KS3 classes have been organised to ensure effective targeting of the support available for SEN pupils. Eight LSAs provide good support to individual pupils and small groups. The co-ordinator monitors the quality of the support termly and there are frequent informal meetings. LSAs keep a daily record of the classroom support to ensure effective provision.

The 23 pupils with literacy difficulties receive additional support from specialist teachers. They are making good progress and transfer the skill learnt successfully to their general learning. The homework club, reading club after school and the Y10 peer group tutors all make a valuable contribution to the pupils' reading skills.

The two UA resource provisions for pupils with statements for speech and language and Aspergers Syndrome are very good. For most of the teaching time they are integrated into mainstream classes, with the backing of experienced specialist teachers or an LSA. For the weekly lessons that they are disappplied from French and Welsh, some are withdrawn to the resource base for specialist help and support. The work and support provided are effective and carefully targeted. Careful records are kept of the pupils' mainstream progress and these are used for future planning. There are very good links with the speech therapist who works closely with the specialist language teacher. Across subjects pupils are achieving well and are fully integrated into school life. The life skills programme gives the pupils a variety of suitable experiences including residential experiences in both key stages that enhance their social skills.

Thirty-one pupils have statements of SEN. The statements are reviewed effectively with all parents present at their child's review. External agencies and the UA are consulted and are involved when required. Ten pupils are on School Action Plus stage and 27 pupils on School Action. The arrangements to identify pupils in need of assistance are good and the SEN register is reviewed regularly. Twenty-five pupils are appropriately disappplied from one or more NC subjects to receive extra support.

All pupils on the SEN register have good IEPs. The plans relate well to the pupils' needs and ability and, where relevant, to their statements of SEN. Targets set are realistic, shared with the pupil and parent and are an incentive for future learning. They are an effective tool in identifying pupils' progress and future objectives to be achieved.

The co-ordinator provides very good whole school guidance and makes good use of ICT to ensure effective communication. The Learning Support Team works closely together to ensure good quality provision. Good links have been established with relevant outside agencies and primary schools. The headteacher and the two designated governors provide very good support to ensure a clear sense of direction with the focus on the inclusion of all special needs pupils.

5.6 Partnership with parents and community, schools and other institutions

The partnership with parents and community, with schools and other institutions is very good.

Policies and procedures are firmly established. The communication policy gives clear guidance to ensure open channels of communication between school, parents and the local community. As a result, parents receive a comprehensive range of information about the school and its activities and have numerous opportunities to be informed and involved as much as they wish. Pre-school literature, the prospectus and the governing body's annual report to parents are user-friendly and of a very good standard in style and presentation and meet Welsh Assembly guidelines. The home/school agreement also meets Welsh Assembly requirements. A weekly newsletter is produced and there is very good information for pupils and parents for important decisions in Y9 and Y11.

The school operates an open-door policy whereby parents are easily able to make contact or make an appointment with the school to discuss concerns. Open evenings are held for each year group with additional evenings for parents of Y9 and Y10 pupils and an annual target day for all year groups in January. The Home/School Association, although small numerically, is very active and provides valuable support in fund raising and other activities. Public events and activities held at the school are well supported by parents, but parents are not involved directly in activities within the school.

There is a strong community ethos in school. The Youth Centre continues as an integral part of the school's activities with youth and community groups making good use of the facilities. The school is outward looking and is aware of its responsibilities to the local and wider community and pupils support a range of national charities. Numerous links with the community are used well to enhance pupils' experiences and the community and environment are used as general educational resources and are linked to a number of subjects.

Links with primary schools are very good. Arrangements for the transfer of Y6 pupils commence early in the educational year and continue throughout the year. Transition is smooth. Arrangements are thorough and well organised. Curricular links have been strengthened and developed well particularly in core subjects. The school takes a long-term attitude towards Y11 transition, with programmes commencing in Y8 and pupils are well prepared for transfer to sixth form or further education. Transition arrangements for KS2 and KS4 pupils have strengthened since the last inspection.

There are extensive links with other local comprehensive schools through cultural activities such as drama and music and sports leagues and tournaments. Links with higher education establishments and further education colleges are very effective. There is a well-established

partnership programme with initial teacher training institutions and numbers of trainee teachers have placements at the school each year.

The wide range of links and partnerships makes a valuable contribution to the life of the school, its ethos and values and to standards of achievement. These aspects have been strengthened and improved significantly since the last inspection.

5.7 Partnership with industry

Partnerships with industry are good. A policy has been developed and implemented which gives clear direction; as a result, there is now an established strategy, a firm commitment and annual programme of activity. Pupils develop good economic and industrial understanding (EIU) and awareness of the world of work. The programme is based on the ACCAC framework for work-related education (WRE).

The complete WRE and EIU programme is allied to preparation and transition in Y11. Pupils from Y7 to Y11 undertake a range of activities to raise their awareness of industry and the relevance of education to industry. Commencing in Y7, all year groups follow a PSE module related to EIU generally. Y8 pupils are involved in the 'Transition Teams' project and all Y9 pupils receive personal guidance on careers related to curriculum options. Y10 pupils undertake a specific programme within the Youth Gateway PSE module and Young Enterprise projects and preparation for work placement. Y11 pupils undertake one week's work experience and a special convention is held annually in the school when Training Agencies are present to advise pupils on future choices and opportunities. Pupils are prepared thoroughly for work placements. However, employers' expertise in relation to mentoring support and direct input into the curriculum is not fully exploited in the WRE programme.

The range of practical links and educational visits is used effectively in many subjects. Valuable links have been established with ELWa and Careers Wales. The present use and extent of teachers' placements in industry for members of staff to extend their knowledge and experiences are satisfactory.

Partnerships in general have been strengthened significantly since the last inspection and as a result, course provision and curricular experiences for pupils have been enhanced.

6. MANAGEMENT

6.1 Quality of self-evaluation and planning for improvement

The quality of self-evaluation and planning for improvement is very good. The school regards monitoring, review and self-evaluation as keys to its success and fundamental to its way of working. The school is constantly looking at strategies to improve its performance and provision further. Development plans have targets to enable a constant focus on improvement. There is a strong sense of team spirit. Leadership has a clear vision and understanding of the school's development. The annual and five year development plans clearly identify short and longer term targets, priorities and success criteria, which are closely monitored and evaluated. Classroom practice is closely observed to try to ensure that

standards of teaching and learning remain high. The school endeavours, through its motto, 'succeeding together' to work in partnership with pupils and parents. The progress of individual pupils is monitored. All have targets for improvement which are negotiated with pupils, parents and form tutors, are written in their planners and monitored by tutors. Pupils' work is scrutinised. Subjects have specific targets for improvement. Performance management has successfully been introduced as an integral part of the process of review and improvement.

Good practice is identified and shared. Roles and responsibilities are published and understood. Consultation is transparent. Heads of department present annual reviews.

Available information is used to set performance indicators and targets. Data is used well to compare and predict performance. The headteacher carried out a whole school review on her appointment, from which the strategic development plan successfully emerged. The review process included questionnaires on staff perceptions and training days. Management carries out rigorous self-evaluation to consider its own progress towards identified goals.

Careful records have been kept of the progress in addressing the key issues identified in the last report. Aspects of overall performance are measured by external benchmarks, such as the Investor in People recognition, the second re-award of which has very recently been approved, with a glowing report and Sportsmarc. A high proportion of staff have followed the European Computer Driving Licence course.

6.2 Leadership and efficiency

The school has a successfully developed, distinctive, positive ethos and culture, emanating from its motto, 'succeeding together', its succinctly expressed aims and objectives and shared sense of purpose and vision, which it is successful in achieving. These are endorsed by parents and pupils and formalised and extended in the consistent philosophy and clear expectations of the comprehensive raft of policies approved by governors. Governors are knowledgeable, fully informed and bring a wide range of expertise for the school's benefit. Their formal links to departments equip them to understand the teaching environment. They are active and discharge their responsibilities well, ensuring compliance with statutory requirements.

The school is well and effectively managed overall. Planning is closely related to the priorities of the school development plan. The headteacher provides clear vision and a sense of purpose. Her leadership has a positive and sustained impact. She is successful in moulding the many disparate aspects of a school into a coherent whole and in building a strong sense of team spirit, for the benefit of pupils. In this she is well supported by her deputy, senior team and by staff at all levels in the school.

Each member of the senior team has specific personal responsibilities, including linking with and reviewing a cluster of subject departments, as well as corporate responsibilities. Liaison and communication between staff with pastoral and subject responsibilities are very good. The quality of management of teachers with whole school responsibilities is very good. Departments are led by teachers who are clear about the direction their subject should take and their management responsibilities.

Teaching and non-teaching staff at all levels in the school work well together and this has been acknowledged by the very recent second re-award of Investor in People status. Communication is very good overall. It is successful in raising awareness and bringing about positive relationships. The daily routine of the school is efficient.

Financial management is very good. There is a good understanding of roles and responsibilities. There are effective procedures to monitor the delegated budget and to ensure best value for money. Financial planning and expenditure are clearly linked to the priorities of the school development plan.

Close liaison with the relevant committees of the governing body ensures that all spending implications are well considered before presenting the budget to the full body for approval. Day-to-day administration is ably carried out by the bursar. Capitation is allocated following discussion of needs with each head of department. The school has successfully secured a number of bids and grants, which have supplemented budget income, enhanced the provision of resources and improved the learning environment. The school gives good value for money.

The few recommendations of the most recent audit report were carefully considered and addressed.

6.3 Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

Staffing

There are 30 full-time and 4 part-time teachers. The pupil:teacher ratio of 17.5:1 is higher than average and than at the time of the last inspection, although the contact ratio of 73% is lower than average, with an equitable distribution of non-contact time for teachers with similar responsibilities. Non-teaching staff make a significant contribution to the successful everyday life of the school.

Teachers are well qualified and experienced. The school experiences low staff turnover and a significant proportion of teachers have been at the school for 10 or more years. They are effectively deployed to cover their pastoral and curricular responsibilities.

Good INSET is provided to ensure up-to-date awareness of developments. It is appropriately organised to balance whole school priorities and the needs of subjects and individual teachers. Good induction is provided for newly qualified teachers and teachers new to the school. Well regarded support and mentoring are provided during the year for trainee teachers from a range of higher education institutions.

Accommodation

The school's striking concrete building occupies a pleasant hilltop site and is surrounded by extensive well-maintained grounds. Many improvements have been made since the last inspection. Increased storage spaces, an extended library, a rolling programme of refurbishment of classrooms and corridors, a refurbished food technology area, roof maintenance and a new entrance area have all increased the effective use of accommodation and enhanced the learning environment.

Accommodation is satisfactory. It is barely sufficient to meet the curricular and pastoral needs of an increasing pupil roll and there are a number of shortcomings. Many subject rooms are arranged to allow good communication within the department, but in geography and science, rooms are not suited. Many departments, especially art, have rooms that are small for the classes taught in them. The occasional use of non-specialist rooms in art and modern foreign languages makes it hard to provide a suitable subject based environment. The present physical education facilities restrict the range of activities on offer and there is no suitable public performing space for drama. Music accommodation is unsatisfactory with poor noise insulation and with small uninviting practice rooms only accessible through the main room. The school manages well the difficulty caused by the main hall also having to act as the school dining area.

Despite these shortcomings, senior managers, teachers and pupils have all helped to produce a pleasant learning environment with many brightly coloured areas and good displays, including celebration of pupils' own good work and effort. The school buildings are well maintained and procedures for dealing with site problems are efficient. Committed caretaking and cleaning staff ensure a high level of cleanliness. Toilets are clean but further attention to the fabric of some toilets is needed. The school is free from graffiti and, apart from some exterior stairwells, from litter. A small number of health and safety issues were brought to the attention of the headteacher.

A new sports hall is about to be built, and new buildings to overcome many existing problems have been agreed in principle. The school constantly battles for extra funding.

Learning resources

The quality and range of learning resources are good overall. Most departments have been provided with sufficient funding in recent years to acquire an adequate level and range of good resources for learning. They are all well cared for and well used. There is, however, a shortage of resources in Welsh, and a lack of a suitable textbook in science at KS3. The modern foreign language department has developed good resources of its own to aid teaching and learning.

The Learning Resources Centre (LRC) has recently been extended to include a computer corner, where four PCs with links to the internet are situated, and a conference corner. A part-time librarian effectively manages the use of the LRC including out of school hours; this use has steadily increased since its renovation. The school intends to further develop the LRC in the near future.

ICT resources are good. The school has 87 computers, with a pupil:computer ratio of 6.5 : 1, better than the national average. There are two specialist suites, and many departments also have a number of computers within their areas. Extensive use is made of the computer rooms, and of the computers in the LRC.

The quality and quantity of resources for sporting activities are good; however, the shortage of indoor accommodation restricts the range of activities that the staff can offer pupils.

7. SUBJECTS AND AREAS OF LEARNING

Standards achieved by pupils

English

Standards of achievement are good in KS3 and KS4.

In the end of KS3 tests in 2002, 76% of pupils, a high proportion, gained the nationally expected level 5 and above. All pupils are entered for both GCSE English and literature, a much higher figure than is usually found. Two thirds gained grades A*-C in English, all gained grades A*-G, of which 10% were at higher A*/A grades. The relative difference between the performance of boys and girls was less than national figures. In literature, 71% of candidates gained A*-C, all gained grades A*-G, 19% of which were at the higher A*/A grades.

Good features

KS3 and KS4

- Presentation and organisation of work are good. Pupils take care and pride in their work.
- Very little work is unfinished.
- Pupils use dictionaries to improve work.
- Time is used purposefully. Pupils respond well to teachers' expectations.
- Pupils with SEN benefit from the support they are given and achieve well.
- Pupils are considerate listeners and have very well developed listening skills.
- They summarise and report well.
- They are mainly confident, articulate speakers, whether posing or answering questions and communicate effectively, increasingly backing their arguments with evidence. They give detailed explanations.
- They show empathy in discussion and sensitivity to poetry.
- When given the opportunity, they work productively in small groups and pairs.
- Many read increasingly difficult texts and develop as regular readers for pleasure.
- They learn to draft, edit and revise their work well, often using ICT.
- Research skills mainly develop well. Most pupils develop well as independent learners.
- Punctuation, spelling and use of standard English are good. Pupils appreciate the need to adapt tone and style for audience and purpose and consistently draft their work accordingly. Much writing is lively and extended.
- They readily read out loud expressively and fluently.
- Pupils benefit greatly from the range of literature they study. They make mature comparisons and contrasts. They appreciate authors' techniques, style and method of intentions.
- They understand character development and its influence on plot.
- They skim and scan to locate, select and reorganise information.

Shortcomings

KS3 and KS4

- Occasionally some pupils appear passive or do not volunteer answers to teachers' questions.
- A few pupils remain over-reliant on the teacher.

The department has maintained good progress since the last inspection.

Mathematics

Standards of achievement are good in KS3 and in KS4.

In the national tests at the end of KS3 in 2002, 73% of pupils achieved level 5 or better. At GCSE, 58.3% of pupils attained grades A*-C also higher than the figure for Wales.

Good features

KS3

- Pupils consolidate their ability to do basic arithmetical operations, although there is still room for this to improve.
- All pupils learn to draw and investigate the properties of geometric shapes at an appropriate level.
- The work on algebra is developing well across the ability range, but particularly amongst the more able pupils.
- All pupils learn how to collect and represent statistical data.
- Pupils with SEN make good progress, and achieve good standards.
- Pupils' competence in using IT to enhance their understanding of mathematics is good.

KS4

- The work on number continues to develop satisfactorily, although mental agility across the ability range is still an area for improved achievement.
- The standard of work in algebra is good, and sometimes very good across the full ability range.
- Pupils of all abilities learn to draw geometric shapes competently. They investigate their properties at an appropriate level. The work on trigonometry is good amongst the more able pupils.
- All pupils learn how to collect and represent statistical data. The more able learn to interpret data well.
- As in KS3, pupils use IT with confidence to enhance their work in mathematics.

Shortcomings

KS3 and KS4

- There is some inappropriate use of calculators by pupils. Departmental policy is unclear in this respect.
- The work on number is insufficiently sharpened.

Since the last inspection, the department has made considerable progress. Test and examination results have improved steadily.

Science

Standards of achievement are good in KS3 and KS4.

Almost all pupils are entered for GCSE Double Science. In 2002, examination results were well above the national average.

Pupils with SEN have full access to the NC and to examination courses in KS4.

Good features

KS3

- Pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of topics covering the NC.
- Most pupils have a good recall of current and previous work. They are able to describe and explain key facts and ideas.
- They are able to apply their knowledge and understanding to solve problems in both familiar and unfamiliar contexts.
- Pupils make good and in some cases very good progress through the key stage. Pupils with SEN make good progress in relation to their abilities.
- Scientific vocabulary is accurately used by a majority of pupils in written descriptions and experimental accounts.
- Pupils generally make good oral contributions in class.
- They use research skills to obtain information from a range of sources.
- Pupils collaborate well in pairs and groups to share ideas and tasks.
- Experimental and investigative skills are acquired and developed throughout the KS. Pupils are able to follow instructions and carry out experiments. They generally make accurate observations and measurements. Most are aware of the need to control variables and to repeat results.
- Pupils can describe and record their results and the majority makes good use of graphical methods in their analysis. Pupils carry out practical work safely.
- The quality and presentation of written work, including extended writing, are generally good and often very good.
- Pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of environmental and health issues.
- The majority of pupils make good use of mathematical skills in scientific contexts.
- Pupils reach good standards in ICT to solve circuit design problems, write scientific reports, create databases and to collect, record and process data.

KS4

- Most pupils build upon their successful KS3 achievements and have a good knowledge and understanding of topics covering life processes and living things, materials and their properties and of physical processes.
- Pupils use their knowledge and understanding to describe and explain a wide range of scientific phenomena. They are able to solve problems in familiar and unfamiliar contexts using mathematical skills as appropriate.
- Pupils, including those with SEN, continue to make good progress.

- Pupils gain information from a range of sources including textbooks, video and the internet.
- Pupils' experimental and investigative skills are further developed. The majority of pupils can link their planning and predictions to scientific theory. They successfully carry out investigations making an appropriate range of observations and accurate readings. They are aware of the need to repeat readings and to make fair comparisons.
- Tables of results and graphs are generally well used in detailed analyses and in making appropriate conclusions. The more able pupils are well able to link their conclusions to scientific theory and to their predictions. The most able make well reasoned suggestions for improving their methods in good evaluations. Presentation of assessed practical work is generally good and in some cases outstanding.
- Pupils reach satisfactory and often good standards in externally assessed practical work.
- Throughout KS3 and KS4 pupils gain in knowledge and awareness of the contributions of science to everyday life. They acquire a good understanding of the social, economic, ethical and environmental aspects of science.

Shortcomings

KS3 and KS4

- A minority have a less secure knowledge and understanding of facts and scientific ideas in some key areas. They make slower progress, in some cases because of lack of confidence and in others by inattention in class.
- A minority have difficulty using scientific vocabulary.
- Pupils in KS4 do not have sufficient "hands on" experience of using ICT in scientific contexts.
- Pupils' plans for assessed practical work often lack records of preliminary investigations and trial results.

Since the last inspection the good standards of achievement have been maintained.

Welsh second language

Standards of achievement are good in KS3 and satisfactory in KS4.

About 25% of pupils are entered for the GCSE full course and their A* - C grades are well above the national average. The remainder are entered for the short course with results a little below the national average.

Good features

KS3

- Pupils respond well in oral sessions. They understand the use of the target language and the contents of audio and video tapes. They can select relevant information to answer basic questions orally and in writing. Good progress is made in listening.
- They gain confidence in their work, are eager to participate in pair and group tasks and respond well to structured questions in set situations. They discuss familiar topics well and can pose and answer questions and give explanations for preferences using constructions like 'achos..'

- More able Y8 and Y9 pupils confidently discuss more difficult topics such as the Welsh music scene or sports. Girls and boys produce good standards. Pupils speak reasonably fluently, using a good range of constructions.
- Reading standards are good, with correct pronunciation. The majority succeed in conveying the meaning of the various passages. Reading aloud is a strength of the department. Pupils are beginning to read books for pleasure.
- Pupils respond well to structured written exercises, using familiar, basic patterns correctly, and varying the person and tense of the verb to good effect. Able Y8 and Y9 pupils use a range of vocabulary and constructions to produce good extended writing which includes diaries, information sheets, transactional tasks and some personal and creative writing.
- Each year group produces tasks on topics which are word processed and enhanced with images, using ICT. These and other poems written by pupils are displayed on classroom walls creating an excellent learning environment.

KS4

- More able pupils following the full and short course make good progress. They work well, enjoy speaking Welsh and have a positive attitude to the language.
- More able pupils listen to cassettes and respond well in written tasks. They speak confidently and accurately, discussing demanding topics like the problems of the young and tension in the family, occasionally providing evidence to prove their point.
- Reading standards of more able pupils are good. They read a variety of materials from textbooks and novels, respond well in oral discussions and in written tasks.
- More able pupils write accurately and interestingly, using a wide range of constructions, verb forms and vocabulary to produce a variety of responses for folio and project work.

Shortcomings

KS3

- Middle and lower ability pupils make basic grammatical and punctuation errors, when the focus is not on grammar. A number of these errors persist.

KS4

- Less able pupils in the short course cannot apply previously learnt constructions and vocabulary without preparation, to argue points or express opinions on topics of some difficulty.
- Only more able pupils can produce extended pieces of writing, using a range of vocabulary and constructions accurately.

The department is mainly successfully raising standards. Since the last inspection pupils have more confidence in using Welsh in group work and the more able pupils have made positive progress in extending their oral and written responses.

Design and technology

Standards of achievement are good in KS3 and in KS4.

In the 2002 GCSE systems and control examination, results were above local and national averages for grades A*-C but marginally below pupils' performance in other subjects.

Good features

KS3 & KS4

- Pupils have a good understanding of the design process. They make good use of this knowledge to design and make quality products.
- Pupils work safely and productively with a range of tools and materials and show an appropriate knowledge of their use.
- They display a good balance in their work between the skills of designing and making.
- Pupils apply themselves enthusiastically to solving design problems making good physical and creative efforts.
- Research and investigative skills are well developed and pupils make good use of this information to write detailed specifications for their products.
- They generate a good range of design ideas from which they select the best one to develop.
- Design ideas are well communicated in well-structured and completed folios of work.
- Pupils are making good use of the recently acquired new technology and a variety of ICT applications are being used effectively including CAD/CAM.
- Pupils gain sound experience of electronics and systems study in KS3 that they are able to build on in KS4.
- The products that pupils make display careful attention to accuracy and finish and display an individual identity. Some very good examples of completed work from pupils currently taking GCSE systems and control were observed.
- In practical lessons pupils pay good attention to health and safety matters.
- Pupils have well developed listening skills and are attentive.
- Pupils with SEN achieve standards well above expectation.

Shortcomings

- A few pupils have fixed ideas about their work. They take decisions before considering a range of possible options.
- Design development including modifications, changes and problem solving, is not always well communicated in design folios.
- A small number of pupils rush into making their products before all the planning is completed.

There has been good progress since the last inspection. Examination results have improved.

Information technology

Standards of achievement across the curriculum are good in both KS3 and KS4.

Throughout the school, pupils acquire IT skills from lessons taught in subject areas across the curriculum. There is no opportunity for pupils to study IT as a discrete subject, although pupils have the opportunity to gain accreditation through an extra-curricular course..

Good features

KS3

- Pupils make good progress in the development of IT competencies.
- They manage computers confidently and effectively. They can log on, call up work, save work and can access appropriate applications and the internet.
- Pupils' communication of information is good. They can combine text and images, change fonts, and layouts appropriately.
- Their design skills are being developed with the acquisition of new technology in DT.
- Pupils are able to set up data-bases and carry out simple interrogations.
- Pupils can set up basic spreadsheets and carry out calculations using formulae. They understand and can apply spreadsheets.

KS4

- Pupils can explain their work and its development, and produce clear, effective documents.
- They can handle information using databases, word processing and desk top publishing.
- They demonstrate good use of appropriate software packages.
- Pupils can carry out research using the internet and CD-Roms.
- Their use of modelling through spreadsheets is good.
- Pupils with SEN make good progress using computers confidently and appropriately.

Shortcomings

- Pupils have insufficient opportunity to consider the social, economic, ethical and moral issues relating to the use of IT.
- KS4 pupils do not have the experience of in-depth project work that involves problem solving. The more able pupils are not sufficiently challenged.

Since the last inspection, considerable progress has been made. Standards of achievement have improved.

History

Standards of achievement are good in KS3 and KS4. In recent years, GCSE examination results have consistently been well above the national and local averages.

Good features

KS3 and KS4

- Pupils have good levels of background knowledge and understanding and recall information successfully.
- Pupils have good listening skills; they are keen to achieve good standards in the learning objectives identified for them in every lesson.
- Pupils have well developed oral skills; the majority of them speak articulately and fluently, using subject-specific vocabulary accurately and in the correct context.
- Pupils have good chronological awareness and can extract accurate and relevant information from a variety of sources of historical evidence. They compare and contrast

different sources of evidence effectively, observing clues perceptively and showing a good ability to apply their background knowledge to interpret and evaluate sources.

- From KS3, pupils develop good investigative approaches in examining historical problems; they recognise the reasons for differing interpretations of historical issues and provide convincing explanations for change over time. Y8 make effective use of sources to explain the causes of poverty in the Tudor period and to analyse the impact of the 1601 Poor Law on social and economic problems.
- By Y9, pupils make good progress in distinguishing between long-term and short-term causes for change, for instance in their work on industrial changes in the 18th and 19th centuries and in their investigations into the causes of the First World War. They make good use of poster sources in determining the impact of the war on public opinion in Britain.
- By KS4, pupils' oral and written work shows a growing maturity in the depth of response to questions and in their insights into the motivation and attitudes of people in the past. They develop an increasingly analytical approach to historical problems, such as the growth of Nazism in Germany in the 1930's. They test their sources of evidence for bias, reliability and usefulness, and they become more confident in asking increasingly complex questions of the sources.
- Pupils' work is well presented and well organised. Increasing focus by the department upon the use of ICT tools results in well illustrated essays, projects, coursework exercises and evidence work. Pupils make good and often very good progress in developing their research skills, using a wide variety of sources, including the Internet. Their written work is carefully planned and logically argued.
- Their knowledge and understanding of the history and culture of Wales are well developed through project and topic work, the effective use of exemplar material and through a range of visits to sites of historical importance.
- Pupils apply their knowledge and understanding from other curricular areas to extend their research and problem solving skills and to enhance their learning in history.

Shortcomings

There are no significant shortcomings.

There has been good progress since the previous inspection.

Geography

Standards of achievement are good in both key stages. GCSE examination results in recent years have been consistently above the local and national averages.

Good features

KS3

- Pupils acquire a wide range of skills and techniques, particularly those associated with the use of maps, annotated sketch maps, diagrams and photographs; they investigate a broad range of geographical issues both in class and in a well-structured programme of fieldwork.
- They have a secure knowledge and understanding of the location, features and character of places at different scales. They make good use of local and Welsh examples to extend

their appreciation of regions further afield. Their grasp of the Cwricwlwm Cymreig is very good.

- Pupils can describe and explain environmental change and how attempts are made to manage it in areas such as the tropical rain forests. They make very good use of IT to further their understanding of the interaction between people and the environment.
- Understanding of theoretical aspects of the programme of study is enhanced by the study of actual situations. Pupils possess an increasing awareness of patterns and processes in physical and human aspects of the subject.

KS4

- Pupils speak and write with increasing accuracy, making good use of previously acquired information. Coursework assignments, which are often of a high standard, reflect effective independent research.
- Pupils give lucid explanations for disparities in the contrasting development of countries on a global scale and show good understanding of the factors that contribute to the quality of life in different places.
- They acquire an increasing vocabulary of geographical terms. They gain access to, and use, a wide range of sources, including ICT, to extract relevant information and use statistical data in a variety of forms to illustrate their findings.
- They have a growing understanding and awareness of the relevance of geography to current economic, social and moral issues; innovative learning situations enable pupils to respond constructively using an investigative approach.

Shortcomings

- No significant shortcomings were noted, but the progress of a very small minority of pupils is restrained by short term recall of information, sometimes a lack of concentration in class and incomplete or missing work in their exercise books.

The good standards identified in the previous report have been maintained and the department has responded constructively to the issues identified at the time.

Modern foreign languages

Standards of achievement are good in KS3 and KS4.

The school enters a far higher proportion of the year group for GCSE examinations in French and German than the national average. In recent years, the percentage of the year group gaining an A*-C grade has consistently been above the national average. In 2002, all pupils entered gained an A*-G grade. The proportion gaining an A*-C grade fell to 50% in French and 69.2% in German. Staffing in the department during the year was affected by long term serious illness.

Good features

KS3

- Pupils listen well to authentic recordings, to the teacher and to each other.
- They understand what they hear and can pick out relevant details.
- They have a good recall of vocabulary and grasp new structures quickly.

- They are keen to take part in oral work in class and volunteer answers readily, boys as well as girls.
- Reading comprehension is good. Pupils read from the internet and e-mail as well as from their course books.
- All pupils produce a good range of extended writing and can adapt a course book model to reflect a more personal response.
- Pupils, including those with SEN, use ICT confidently to redraft their written work and improve their accuracy.

KS4

- Pupils listen well to the teacher and to cassette and video recordings.
- Listening and reading comprehension skills are good.
- Pupils are confident in familiar oral tasks and can ask and answer a wide range of questions.
- Able pupils generally cope well with unprepared questions.
- GCSE oral presentations are well prepared.
- Coursework is generally good. Pupils use a good range of vocabulary and structures and accuracy improves with redrafting.

Shortcomings

KS3

- Pupils do not regularly use the target language for everyday classroom exchanges and are less confident when answering unprepared questions on familiar topics.
- They do insufficient reading for their own enjoyment e.g from magazines, to develop greater independence.

KS4

- Pupils in Y10 are slow to use the full range of language and tenses acquired in Y9.

Since the last inspection, good standards have been maintained in both key stages.

Art

Standards of achievement in KS3 are satisfactory and good in KS4.

At GCSE all pupils achieve grades A*-G and results at the higher grades A*-C are above the national average for both boys and girls.

Good features

KS3

- Pupils make satisfactory progress in developing their observational drawing skills.
- Colour is understood and used with confidence, particularly in collage work.
- Pupils are able to produce expressive painting based on personal responses to music.
- Pupils are beginning to use a sketchbook effectively.
- Three-dimensional skills are developed using imaginative techniques.
- Pupils are introduced to the art of Wales in themes that link Celtic myths and legends.
- They are able to work with a satisfactory range of new materials.

- Some pupils develop new clay skills by working with an artist-in-residence.
- Pupils are beginning to form critical personal opinions and judgement about art.
- Pupils with learning difficulties make satisfactory progress.
- Pupils are regularly involved in the assessment process and this results in their knowing what they have to do to improve.

KS4

- Observational drawing and painting from nature are done with sensitivity.
- The work of artists, such as Miro, is successfully reinterpreted in pupils' own designs.
- Sketchbook work shows an imaginative and experimental approach.
- Pupils successfully use computers as an aid to research and as a creative tool.
- They have a broad understanding of art from visits to art galleries
- They can use their art skills to express moral and social issues.
- Pupils are familiar with Welsh artists and the art of Wales.
- They develop an understanding of the art of other cultures by working with an African sculptor.

Shortcomings

- KS3 pupils do not visit art galleries to broaden their art awareness. They do not work with computers to research and make art. Higher ability pupils do not regularly receive more demanding tasks.

Since the previous report there has been very good progress.

Music

Despite continued constraints of accommodation inhibiting progress, standards are satisfactory in KS3 and good in KS4. GCSE results in recent years have been well above the national average.

Good features

KS3

- Pupils sing with enthusiasm. They play a variety of pieces on classroom instruments and keyboards with a good degree of accuracy and maintain good ensemble when performing with others.
- Most pupils explore and combine sounds imaginatively in various "Programme" music compositions. A few short improvisations are well shaped and rhythmically interesting.
- Most pupils make suitable progress in developing skills of aural discrimination with more able pupils making perceptive comments when appraising their own music-making.

KS4

- Pupils are able and experienced performers and achieve good standards in individual and group performance.
- Most Y10 pupils are making good progress in their "Blues" compositions. A few Y11 compositions display interesting treatment of ideas and have a good sense of style and structure.
- Pupils make effective use of ICT to store and refine their work in composing.

- Pupils, in general, are able to discern features well when appraising recorded extracts of music from different styles and periods.

Shortcomings

KS3

- Pupils do not always sing with sufficient attention to musical detail and expression.
- In general, pupils' improvisation skills to create and develop melodic phrases are limited and experiences narrow. Pupils' ability to apply their aural skills effectively in evaluating the use of elements in music of different styles and periods is not fully developed.

KS4

- A few pupils find composing difficult and need support to make progress.

Good quality instrumental tuition, received by one in seven of pupils on roll, together with numerous extra-curricular groups of good and sometimes very good standard, complement the work of the department. These groups make a worthwhile contribution to the life of the school and the community.

Since the previous inspection standards have improved in KS4 and have been consolidated in KS3.

Physical education

Standards of achievement are good in KS3 and in KS4.

In 2002 all pupils entered for the GCSE examination gained a grade with 58% achieving grades A*-C.

Good features

- In both key stages the level of participation is very good. Pupils wear correct kit and they respond positively in all lessons. Equipment is handled safely and is treated with care.

KS3

- Y7 pupils make good progress as a result of carefully structured and well-planned lessons.
- In Y8 the majority of girls achieve good and sometimes very good standards in gymnastics. Several can produce creative and imaginative sequences showing a level of control and fluency that is well above average.
- Most Y9 pupils build on their previous experiences very effectively, applying their skills successfully in new situations, for example in throwing the javelin.
- Throughout the key stage, pupils can plan aspects of their own work and evaluate the work of others, suggesting possible areas of improvement.
- Pupils listen attentively, they apply what they have heard successfully in practical situations and work with enthusiasm and enjoyment.
- Individual pupils achieve representative honours at county level or higher in athletics, cross-country, football, rugby, cricket, hockey and swimming.

KS4

- Pupils are able to successfully build on work undertaken earlier to further develop their level of performance, especially in games.
- The majority of pupils have developed good basketball skills, particularly passing and dribbling, and a sound understanding of team play.
- Pupils follow the GCSE course work with maturity and commitment. They have a good understanding of appropriate technical terms and can link the theoretical and practical aspects of their studies very effectively.
- They are capable of sustained physical activity, can evaluate progress in performance and suggest possible areas for improvement, for example when devising and undertaking 'sports specific circuits'.
- Pupils make good use of ICT, including the video camera and CD-Roms to support their learning.
- Individual pupils achieve representative honours at county level or higher in athletics, football, women's football, gymnastics, rugby, cricket, swimming and badminton.

Shortcomings

KS3

- Increased numbers, coupled with a shortage of indoor accommodation, mean that Y7 pupils can spend only 2 blocks of 4 weeks on gymnastic activities, which has had an adverse effect on their gymnastic standards.

KS4

- The range of indoor activities that pupils experience is limited by the shortage of suitable accommodation.

In both key stages pupils have good opportunities to become involved in extra-curricular activities at lunchtime and after school as well as in inter-school games.

Standards have been maintained since the last inspection when the school had been awarded the Sportsmark for the quality of its overall provision.

Religious education

Standards of achievement are good at KS3 and very good at KS4. The GCSE short course examination results are well above the national average.

Good features

KS3

- Pupils across the full ability range have good knowledge and understanding of the units of work studied, which reflect the local agreed syllabus.
- They know how believers of the various faiths that they study worship and celebrate their religion. They are aware of the ways in which religious and other beliefs affect people's lifestyle.
- Most pupils give a thoughtful response to religious and moral issues and show a growing confidence in reflecting on beliefs and values, both their own and others.

- In their written work, pupils show the ability to write at length, successfully building on good knowledge with appropriate reflection of personal beliefs.
- Less able pupils have good knowledge of the topics studied, have appropriate vocabulary and key terms and can present factual information well.
- Throughout the KS pupils are developing good skills to acquire information from different sources, select and reorganise it and present their findings.

KS4

- Pupils have very good factual knowledge and understanding of current moral, social and religious issues.
- They understand about faith communities and are able to give thoughtful responses in relation to religious and moral issues.
- They know that people have different beliefs and values based on religious traditions and understand that religious teaching provides a basis for social and moral values within the communities that they live in.
- They are able to recall factual information from previous learning and show an increasing ability to apply what they know in different contexts. .
- They are learning to respond thoughtfully to contemporary moral and social issues, ask perceptive questions and have confidence to express a personal opinion based on their knowledge.

Shortcomings

KS3

- In some large classes, opportunities for pupils to express a view and debate in small groups are limited.

Progress since the last inspection has been good.

Personal and social education

Standards of achievement are good overall in both KS3 and KS4.

Because of the two week timetable, no PSE lessons took place during the week of the inspection. Evidence was taken from documentation, scrutiny of work and from interviews with staff and pupils.

Good features

KS3 and KS4

- Pupils are courteous, confident, have respect for each other and are aware that there is a need to help others.
- They work well as individuals, in pairs and in groups, showing good levels of collaboration
- Most pupils are able to generate and participate in discussion.
- They are able to explain their ideas to others in a positive manner and can frame their own questions.
- When the opportunity arises, pupils can use computers with confidence to research topics.
- Pupils are made aware of personal development and personal safety.

- They understand the influences in their lives and are aware of the consequences of the misuse of substances such as drugs, including nicotine and alcohol.
- Pupils know what is right and wrong, recognise moral issues, show good awareness of anti-social behaviour and understand the concept of equal opportunities.
- They are given good guidance and advice on work experience and careers.
- Pupils have the opportunity to review and reflect on their learning and revision skills.
- The pupils themselves use ICT to produce their own personal statements for their ROAs.
- Most pupils appreciate the school's pastoral guidance programme and find it useful.

PSE was not a subject in the curriculum at the last inspection.

Child development

Standards of achievement are very good.

In the 2002 GCSE examinations results at grades A*-C were well above local and national averages and well above pupils' achievement in other subjects. This has been a trend over a number of years.

Good features

- Pupils display the ability to apply theoretical knowledge to problem solving tasks set by the examination board as coursework.
- Work is presented to a very high standard and some of the products made are completed to a professional standard.
- Pupils use ICT effectively for a range of purposes.
- Analytical and research skills are well developed.
- Pupils display good independent learning skills and are willing to devote a considerable amount of their own time to the subject because they enjoy it.
- They discuss subject related issues in lessons and show good subject knowledge and a mature understanding of some sensitive issues.

Shortcomings

No significant shortcomings were identified.

Progress has been very good since the last inspection.

Drama

Standards of achievement are good in both key stages. In GCSE in 2002 all pupils entered achieved a grade.

Good features

KS3

- Pupils collaborate well in pairs and groups to plan, rehearse and present their work.
- Pupils generally perform without inhibition and show enthusiasm for the activities.

- They show imagination in their responses to the stimuli with which they are presented.
- They use gestures and facial expression well and develop an understanding of the use of levels and grouping.
- Speaking and listening skills are good, both in group discussion and in performance, when many pupils are able to project well.
- Pupils' skills develop systematically. They understand the terminology of the subject and respond appropriately using techniques such as mime, freeze frame and hot seating.
- They respond well to the textual material with which they are presented, showing perception in representing it dramatically.
- Pupils with SEN are able to participate fully in the class activities, contributing to preparation and performance with interest and enthusiasm.
- Pupils form an attentive and appreciative audience to each other's work.

KS4

- Pupils work well in groups, devising, rehearsing and presenting a good variety of drama, showing imagination and, through the KS, an increasing awareness of the use of stage space and the technical resources.
- They demonstrate sensitivity and good perception in creating character and developing the capacity through the key stage to utilise an appropriate range of voice, deportment and gesture.
- Pupils show skill in evaluating their own activities, those of their classmates and of theatre companies, in keeping working diaries and in well-constructed written responses to professional productions, in which they demonstrate good ICT skills.
- They are confident in performing scripted and devised pieces.
- Pupils show interest and enjoyment, with a commitment to the subject which extends beyond lessons to involvement in the drama club and in public productions.

There are no significant shortcomings. Although a few younger pupils have not yet developed maturity and lack self-discipline, under firm management they respond appropriately.

Drama makes a significant contribution to pupils' personal development and to the life of the school. Since the last inspection good standards of achievement have been maintained, although the availability of suitable accommodation for public performance remains a problem.

Home Economics

Food & Nutrition

Standards of achievement are very good.

In the 2002 GCSE examinations, pupils achieved A*-C grades above local and national averages and performed better than in their other subjects.

Good features

- Coursework folios are of a very high standard and display an individual identity and very good subject knowledge.
- Pupils tackle practical work confidently, carrying out their own planning and working safely and hygienically.
- They can propose realistic solutions to food-related tasks.
- The food produced shows practical skill.
- Pupils explain their ideas confidently both orally and in writing.
- Pupils with SEN achieve very well.

Shortcomings

- Pupils generally are over-reliant on the teacher to direct their examination revision time in lessons.

Steady progress has been maintained.

Media Studies

Standards of achievement in this KS4 GCSE option are good.

In the GCSE examination in 2002 all pupils who sat the examination achieved a grade. The proportion achieving grades A* to C was higher than nationally.

Good features

- Pupils show good knowledge and understanding of media terminology and conventions and are able to use them in discussion and preparation of their own pieces of work.
- They work cooperatively and with enjoyment planning and preparing group responses to tasks set.
- Pupils make good use of technology and show good ICT skills in the completion of lesson and coursework tasks, using the internet to find appropriate images which they are able to incorporate in accomplished word-processed and desktop published text.
- They show good analytical skills, both in the oral and written discussion of a wide range of media material and in accounts of the preparation of their coursework pieces.
- Pupils respond with imagination to practical tasks such as preparing the animation of a story, creating a photo-story and designing a band.
- They develop the capacity to work quite independently, using their teachers as advisers and consultants.

There are no significant shortcomings.

Good standards of achievement have been maintained since the last inspection.

8. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

8.1 Progress since the last inspection

Progress since the last inspection

- 1. Improve the standards and dimension of Welsh and art within the curriculum and school in general.*

Both teaching areas have been improved. Both subjects use ICT as a teaching tool. Both departments are stimulating, lively and bright. GCSE results have improved in both areas.

- 2. Improve the standards in IT and extend the use of computers across the curriculum in order to meet the NC requirements and to prepare pupils more fully for the technological age.*

All departments now use ICT in schemes of work, for homework tasks and as a tool, where appropriate. It is now mapped across the curriculum. Several new networks are in place. Interactive whiteboards are used. Standards of achievement are good. All staff are competent users of ICT.

- 3. Develop pupils' independence and initiative as learners, including more effective use of the school library as a central resource.*

The library has been extended, and includes ICT resources. It now works well as a whole-school resource during school and it operates at breaks, lunchtimes and after school for research and independent use.

- 4. Make better use of mid term and longer term planning in subject and school improvement programs, including setting priorities, targets and resource implications.*

Planning is now a strength. Following detailed consultation, longer and mid term development plans are drawn up, the progress of which are closely monitored.

- 5. Accelerate the programme for enhancement of the school's learning environment and make more effective use of the resources and accommodation available.*

Much redecoration, refurbishment and improvement have taken place. Displays are attractive. Effective use is made of available accommodation and resources. Accommodation shortcomings remain. The school is active in seeking extension and improvement provision. A number of bids have been successful. Other bids and reviews are at various stages.

- 6. Ensure compliance with the statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship.*

Collective worship is monitored. The 'thought for the day' has been reintroduced. Requirements are met.

7. *Attend to the Health and Safety issues raised during the inspection.*

These issues were successfully addressed.

8.2 Key issues for action

There are no major issues. The school has a very good record of self-development and has maintained high standards. In order to further this picture of success, the headteacher, staff and governors should consider the following:

- maintain the school's positive features and the consistency of teaching and learning,
- raise standards in those subjects described as satisfactory in the report,
- by sharing existing good practice, ensure that all subjects adopt a common range of approaches to assessment which are more closely matched to NC levels of attainment, thus providing pupils with a clearer knowledge of the progress they are making and inform future planning to improve it,
- continue to review, share and develop the range of teaching styles to inspire, challenge and stimulate pupils and hasten their emergence as independent learners,
- develop and implement a whole school numeracy policy, and
- address the health and safety issues identified to the school.

Acknowledgement

The registered inspector and team wish to thank the governors, headteacher, staff and pupils for their co-operation and courtesy before and during the inspection.

APPENDIX

A. Basic information about the school

Name of School	Argoed High School
School type	Comprehensive
Age -range of pupils	11-16 years
Address of school	Bryn Road Bryn-y-Baal Nr Mold Flintshire
Post-Code	CH7 6RY
Telephone Number	01352 756414

Headteacher	Mrs A Brown
Date of appointment	January 2000
Chair of Governors/ Appropriate Authority	Mr P Swift
Registered Inspector	Mr JE James
Dates of inspection	6-9 May 2003

B. School data and indicators

Year group	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Total
Number of pupils	141	107	117	101	100	566

<i>Total number of teachers</i>			
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time equivalent (fte)
Number of teachers	30	4	32.38

<i>Staffing information</i>	
Pupil:teacher (fte) ratio (excluding special classes)	17.5:1
Pupil:adult (fte) ratio in special classes	7:1
Average teaching group size	24.1
Overall contact ratio	73%

	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Whole school
Spring 03	95.7	95.14	94.28	89.98	91.95	93.48
Autumn 02	95.11	94.65	93.78	93.35	93.16	94.09
Summer 02	92.83	94.27	93.46	88.27	96.23	92.77

Percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals	3.2
Number of pupils excluded during 12 months prior to inspection	4 temporary

C. Results of National Curriculum assessments and public examinations

National Curriculum Assessment KS3 results: 2002															
Total number of pupils in Y9: 101															
Percentage of pupils at each level															
			D	A	F	W	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	EP
EN	Teacher assessment	School		1					5	22	37	20	15		
		National		1				2	9	22	34	21	8		
	Test	School		2	1				7	15	39	23	14		
		National		2	0.3	1	0.5	6	11	29	31	14	5		
MA	Teacher assessment	School		1					2	19	22	42	14		
		National		1				1	10	20	25	26	13		
	test	School		3					3	22	17	41	15		
		National		1	0.3	0.6	0.1	1	14	26	25	23	9		
SC	Teacher assessment	School		1					1	14	31	42	12		
		National		1	1			1	10	24	31	23	9		
	Test	School		6					1	11	26	40	17		
		National		3	0.1	0.5		0.6	12	28	29	21	6		

Percentage of pupils attaining at least level 5 in mathematics, science and either English or Welsh (first language)			
by Teacher Assessment		by Test	
In the school:	65	In the school:	61
In Wales:	52	In Wales:	50

D - Pupils exempted under statutory arrangements from part of the National Curriculum

A - Pupils who have failed to register a level because of absence

F - Pupils who have failed to register a level for reasons other than absence

W - Pupils who are working towards level 1

EP - Exceptional Performance, where pupils at Key Stage 3 perform above level 8.

For pupils aged 15, results in GCSE, CoE, GNVQ and NVQ			
Number of pupils aged 15 on the school roll in January 2002: 84			
The percentage of 15 year old pupils who in 2002:			
	School	UA	Wales
were entered for 5 or more GCSEs	98	88	86
achieved 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C	67	51	50
achieved 5 or more GCSE grades A*-G	100	87	85
achieved GCSE grades A*-C in each of mathematics, science, English or Welsh first language)	57	37	37
entered at least one CoE, GCSE short course or GCSE	100	94	97
achieved one or more GCSE grades A*-C	90	74	74
achieved one or more GCSE grades A*-G	100	91	92
achieved no graded GCSE	0	9	8
achieved one or more CoE only	0	2	3

D. The evidence base of the inspection

The school was inspected by a team of 17 inspectors, who spent 46 inspection days in school collecting evidence and inspecting all subjects. Inspectors observed 162 lessons in full or in part. All teachers present were seen teaching, most on a number of occasions. Planned discussions were held with the majority of teachers, including members of the leadership team and year and subject heads, with non-teaching staff, support workers and the chairman and members of the governing body. In addition, there were informal discussions with both teaching and non-teaching staff, and an informal lunchtime meeting was held, to which governors, members of the local community, and many professional and visiting agencies to the school were invited. In a meeting with the registered inspector, members of the governing body discussed their role in action which had been taken since the previous inspection.

All the work of a representative sample of pupils from each year group was examined, and planned discussions were held subsequently with these pupils. Pupils' records, past work, work during lessons and displays around the school were scrutinised. Inspectors spoke informally with many more pupils, and examined their work during class visits. The inspectors visited many tutorial and registration periods and all assemblies, together with a range of out-of-school activities, homework clubs and meetings. Pupils were observed at lunchtimes, travelling to and from lessons, and coming to and from the school.

The school helpfully provided an extensive range of informative documents which was analysed before and during the inspection. The inspection team carefully considered 105 responses made by parents to questionnaires distributed before the inspection and the comments by 15 parents at the pre-inspection meeting conducted by the registered inspector.

E. Composition and responsibilities of the inspection team

Team member	Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
JE James Registered Inspector	English	Context; main findings; standards achieved in subjects and areas of learning; standards achieved in key skills across the curriculum; support attendance; quality of teaching; quality of self-evaluation and planning for improvement; leadership and efficiency; staffing; progress since the last inspection; key issues for action
JH James Lay Inspector		Behaviour and attitudes; attendance; partnership with parents and community, schools and other institutions; partnership with industry
Dr E Price-Jones Core team	Mathematics	Support, guidance and pupils' welfare; resources
ATF Woods Core team	Science coordination (chemistry)	Support behaviour and attitudes; assessment, recording and reporting; accommodation
H Evans	Religious education	Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education; special educational needs
G Leech	Drama, media studies, support English	Curriculum
E Bowyer	Geography	
AV Edwards	Information technology PSE coordinator	
E Forster	Art	
AW Jones	Music	
T Lewis	Welsh	
B McCann	Physical education	
A Newman	History	
A Powell	Science (biology)	
P Swinnerton	Design and technology, home economics, child development	
TG Thomas	Science (physics)	
A Woods	Modern foreign languages	