

REPORT
on the
INSPECTION UNDER SECTION 10 OF
THE SCHOOL INSPECTION ACT 1996

CYFARTHFA HIGH SCHOOL
CAE MARI DŴN
QUEEN'S ROAD
MERTHYR TYDFIL
CF47 0LS

School Number: 675/4013

Date of Inspection: 10 – 14 February 2003

By

Mrs A Powell
Registered Inspector W131

Under Estyn contract number: T/25/02

© **CROWN COPYRIGHT 2003**

This report may be reproduced for non-commercial educational purposes but only as a whole and provided it is reproduced verbatim without adaptation and the source and date thereof are stated.

Copies of the full report are available from the school. Under the School Inspection Act 1996, the school must provide copies of the report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the cost of reproduction may be made to others requesting a copy of the report.

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.

CONTENTS

	Page
1. CONTEXT	
The school and its priorities	1
2. MAIN FINDINGS	
The main findings of the report	1
3. EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS	
3.1 Standards achieved in subjects and areas of learning	6
3.2 Standards achieved in key skills across the curriculum	7
4. ETHOS OF THE SCHOOL	
4.1 Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	9
4.2 Behaviour and attitudes	10
4.3 Attendance	11
5. QUALITY OF EDUCATION	
5.1 Teaching	11
5.2 Assessment, recording and reporting	13
5.3 Curriculum	14
5.4 Support, guidance and pupils' welfare	16
5.5 Provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN)	18
5.6 Partnership with parents and community, schools and other institutions	19
5.7 Partnership with industry	20
6. MANAGEMENT	
6.1 Quality of self-evaluation and planning for improvement	20
6.2 Leadership and efficiency	21
6.3 Staffing, accommodation and learning resources	22

7. SUBJECTS AND AREAS OF LEARNING

Standards achieved by pupils

English	24
Mathematics	25
Science	26
Welsh second language	27
Design and technology	29
Information technology	30
History	31
Geography	33
Modern foreign languages	34
Art	35
Music	36
Physical education	38
Religious education	40
Religious studies	41
Personal and social development	41
Business studies	42
Child development	43
Drama	44
Sociology	45
Catering	46
Vocational education	46

8. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

8.1	Progress since the last inspection	48
8.2	Key issues for action	50

APPENDIX

A.	Basic information about the school	51
B.	School data and indicators	51
C.	Results of National Curriculum assessments and public examinations	52
D.	The evidence base of the inspection	54
E.	Composition and responsibilities of the inspection team	55

1. CONTEXT

The school and its priorities

Cyfarthfa High school is an 11-18 mixed comprehensive school situated in Merthyr Tydfil. Year seven and year eight (Y7 and Y8) pupils occupy the lower school in Cyfarthfa Castle and the remainder of the school occupies a modern building a few miles away. Both sites are attractive but the castle has a very special ambience. There are 1404 pupils on roll compared to 1138 at the time of the previous inspection in 1997. Pupils are drawn mainly from the town of Merthyr Tydfil. The area has prosperous sections but is relatively disadvantaged economically; 22 percent of pupils are entitled to free school meals. Most pupils come from English speaking homes; less than one percent of pupils speak Welsh as a first language. Less than one percent come from minority ethnic groups. There is a full range of ability represented in the school. Twenty eight percent of pupils are identified on the school's register of pupils with special educational needs (SEN).

The school's priorities for 2002-2004 are concerned with reviewing management, improving key skills, extending teaching and learning and extra curricular provision and implementing self assessment strategies. Target setting and continuous review are firmly embedded in the culture of the school.

2. MAIN FINDINGS

The main findings of the report

- Cyfarthfa High school is a very good school with many strengths. It fully achieves its mission statement to raise achievement by caring. It is very successful in terms of its ethos, standards of achievement and quality of teaching. There has been considerable improvement in standards of achievement and quality of teaching since the previous inspection in 1997. The school benefits from the clear vision and very effective leadership of the head teacher. The leadership team displays a clear educational direction and a shared commitment to implement improvements. Throughout the school, management is very good. A culture of continuous improvement is very well established and is very effective.
- The standards achieved by pupils are at least satisfactory in 100% of classes and good or better in 89%. Very good standards are achieved in 17% of classes and these occur in all key stages. In 34% of classes in the sixth form there are very good standards of achievement. Achievement is better in the sixth form (95% good or better) than in KS3 (84 % good or better) or KS4 (91% good or better). In the previous inspection in 1997, standards of achievement were good in 39% of classes in KS3 and KS4, and in 50% of classes in the sixth form.
- More able pupils make at least good progress in all subjects in all key stages. In science and religious education they achieve very good standards in all key stages. More able sixth form students make very good progress in most subjects. Pupils of other abilities,

including those with SEN, make at least good progress across the curriculum. Students in the sixth form achieve very good standards in many subjects

Table of standards achieved in subjects

	Satisfactory	Good	Very good
KS3		English, mathematics, science, Welsh, design and technology, information technology, history, geography, modern foreign languages, art, music, physical education, religious education, personal and social education (PSE), drama	
KS 4		English, mathematics, science, Welsh, design and technology, information technology, history, modern foreign languages, art, music, physical education, PSE, drama, business studies, catering, child development.	Geography, religious education, religious studies.
Sixth form		Mathematics, science, Welsh, computing, history, modern foreign languages, religious education, PSE, business studies, sociology, leisure and tourism.	English, geography, art, design and technology, music, drama, physical education, history, health and social care, information technology, religious studies.

- Standards of achievement in speaking, reading and writing are good; standards in listening are very good. Pupils can express ideas, reasons and opinions clearly and in detail, orally and in their written work. The great majority of pupils are able to read fluently and with understanding. Research skills are good. Good use of the library in the lower school enhances pupils' reading skills, but access to library facilities in the upper school is limited.
- Standards of achievement in numeracy are good in all key stages. Sixth form students are able to interpret and analyse complex statistical data in a wide variety of appropriate contexts. In KS3 and KS4, most pupils have a thorough understanding of number and can complete simple calculations in many subjects. They collect and analyse data well from surveys and questionnaires in a wide range of different contexts and make good use of a variety of graphs to record and analyse data.
- Standards of achievement in ICT are good in KS4 and the sixth form and satisfactory in KS3. In the sixth form, students make good progress in developing and applying a wide range of ICT skills across the curriculum. In KS4, pupils confidently use a wide range of applications and skills. In KS3, there are instances of ICT skills being developed and

applied for a range of purposes but the ICT experiences of a significant minority of pupils in KS3 are insufficient.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

- The ethos of the school is a major strength and reflects a clear sense of shared values. All concerned with the school work effectively together to create an atmosphere where pupils can develop as individuals and as members of a wider community. The school is a caring community where all are valued. Pupils' spiritual development is good and their moral, social and cultural development are very good.
- Pupils are confident to relate and reflect on their experiences and offer personal responses through discussion. They respect the views of others and value their opinions. On the days when pupils do not attend an assembly a 'thought for the week' forms part of the tutor period. This does not occur in all tutor periods so that the school does not meet the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.
- Pupils have a very clear sense of right and wrong and show respect for each other, their teachers, other adults and the environment. Through their enthusiastic support for a great number of local and national charities, pupils of all abilities show a sense of responsibility towards others less fortunate than themselves.
- Relationships throughout the school are very good. Pupils are very friendly, helpful and cooperate very well in lessons and other activities. They are developing self reliance and the ability to show initiative. Sixth form students are very actively involved in supporting younger pupils and organising events in the school and community.
- There is a very good range of extra curricular activities which extends pupils' personal, social and cultural development.
- Standards of behaviour and attitudes towards learning are consistently very good throughout the school and this makes a positive contribution to standards of achievement and quality of life in the school. Pupils exercise self discipline, and movement between lessons is orderly and responsible; no time is wasted between classroom transfers. The school's anti-bullying procedures are implemented effectively.
- The average attendance over the three terms preceding the inspection was just below 90%. This is unsatisfactory. Improving attendance is a priority in the school and there is an appropriate range of measures to do so including effective strategies to ensure pupils complete missed work on their return to school. Nevertheless, a significant minority of pupils have periods of long term absence or patterns of intermittent absence and this adversely affects their standards of achievement.

Quality of education

- The quality of teaching is a major strength of the school. It is satisfactory or better in 100% of classes and good or better in 91%. These figures greatly exceed targets set by the National Assembly for the year 2002 for the quality of teaching in 95% of classes to be at least satisfactory and 50% good or better. In 20% of classes there is teaching of very good quality and this occurs in all key stages. The quality of teaching is better in the sixth

form (97% good or better) than in KS3 (86% good or better) or KS4 (91% good or better). In 34% of classes in the sixth form, the quality of teaching is very good. In the previous inspection in 1997, the quality of teaching was good in 59% of classes in KS3, 64% in KS4 and 79% in the sixth form.

- Teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach and are fully aware of current initiatives. Planning is detailed and very thorough. There is a good range of activities employed to ensure pupils develop the skills of communication and numeracy. Strategies to develop ICT across the curriculum are implemented well in KS4 and the sixth form but inconsistently in KS3.
- Classroom organisation is consistently good and in almost all lessons there is an atmosphere conducive to learning. Teachers' expectations are high and activities are well matched to individual needs and previous achievement. Presentations, paired and group activities are used very well to ensure that pupils share ideas and tasks and develop their understanding. The range of teaching techniques used in lessons is consistently good and lessons are well structured. In many lessons, pupils further develop their understanding when very skilful questions provide sufficient opportunities for them to reflect on their ideas.
- Assessment, recording and reporting are good. The use made of assessments to improve standards of achievement is good but there are shortcomings, particularly in KS3. Teachers usually provide useful oral feedback to individuals and to the whole class. There are very good written examples, particularly in KS4 and the sixth form, of detailed comments identifying strengths and weaknesses and how to improve; in other books comments are too general. All departments have procedures for pupils to assess their own progress and set targets for improvement but the use of self-assessment to involve pupils in their own learning is fully effective in only a minority of subjects. Pupils are insufficiently aware of their strengths and weaknesses and what they must do to improve in terms of the specific requirements of the different subjects.
- Arrangements for recording pupils' achievement and progress are very good. Reports to parents are good. The school is making good progress in implementing its plans to develop an effective formative review of progress through progress files. The use made of the analysis of internal assessment and external examination data is very good at whole school and departmental levels.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets all statutory requirements for the National Curriculum and religious education throughout the school. Curriculum provision is effective and inclusive, offering pupils of all abilities equal access and opportunity. Pupils with SEN in KS3 and KS4 have access to the National Curriculum, to accredited courses in KS4 and to vocational programmes. They enjoy good support for integration into the full life of the school including extra curricular activities. Those in the designated SEN groups in KS3 and KS4 are, however, insufficiently integrated into subjects where they could develop their social skills more effectively.
- The quality of support and guidance and the procedures for promoting pupils' welfare are very good. The lower school provides a very effective bridge between the primary school and Y9. The school's pastoral system is very effective and plays an important role in ensuring that the school is a community and a secure environment where hard work and

mutual support are valued. Academic and personal progress are carefully monitored and pupils are helped to achieve their full potential. Pupils are proud of their school.

- Support for sixth formers is very good. The monitoring of students' academic progress is thorough and regular and leads to the setting of effective individual targets for improvement. Teachers provide very good support in individual subjects. Students gain self-confidence and increasing independence and are well prepared for life in the wider world. The contribution made by the sixth form to school life is significant and represents a strength of the school.
- The quality of PSE and careers education and guidance programmes is good.
- The provision for pupils with SEN is good and the school's response to the requirements of the Code of Practice is very good.
- Liaison with parents, the community, schools and other institutions is very good. Links with industry, commerce and the world of business are well established and are very good.

Management

- The quality of self-evaluation and planning for improvement is very good. There is a clear focus on raising standards of achievement, a thoughtful commitment to what the school wants to achieve and a shared sense of common purpose. Planning, monitoring and evaluating at whole school and departmental levels are very good.
- The school benefits from the clear vision and very effective leadership of the head teacher. The quality of management of the leadership team, those teachers with whole school responsibilities and heads of departments is very good. Communication is very good throughout the school and whole school initiatives are very well coordinated. There are effective strategies to overcome the difficulties of the split site.
- Staff are a major strength of the school and are very committed to its success. The INSET provision is very good.
- Accommodation is satisfactory. It is sufficient to meet the curriculum and pastoral needs of pupils but there are shortcomings. Pupils in the lower school benefit from the special ambience which it provides, but many rooms in the building are damp. Many rooms in both schools are too small for the classes taught in them. The physical education changing rooms are too small. There is no specialised accommodation for drama in either the upper or the lower school.
- The library in the lower school is used extensively by the English department and by departments across the curriculum as a resource centre to support wider reading for information and pleasure. The upper school library is not used effectively as a whole school resource centre.

Progress since the last inspection

The previous report identified eight key issues for action. There has been progress made in addressing all the key issues. Progress in key issues one, two, five and eight has been very good. There has been good progress in issue three and satisfactory progress in the remainder.

3. EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

3.1 Standards achieved in subjects and areas of learning

The standards achieved by pupils are at least satisfactory in 100% of classes and good or better in 89%. Very good standards are achieved in 17% of classes and these occur in all key stages. In 34% of classes in the sixth form there are very good standards of achievement. Achievement is better in the sixth form (95% good or better) than in KS3 (84 % good or better) or KS4 (91% good or better). In the previous inspection in 1997, standards of achievement were good in 39% of classes in KS3 and KS4, and in 50% of classes in the sixth form.

Table of standards achieved in subjects

	Satisfactory	Good	Very good
KS3		English, mathematics, science, Welsh, design and technology, information technology, history, geography, modern foreign languages, art, music, physical education, religious education, PSE, drama	
KS4		English, mathematics, science, Welsh, design and technology, information technology, history, modern foreign languages, art, music, physical education, PSE, drama, business studies, catering, child development.	Geography, religious education, religious studies.
Sixth form		Mathematics, science, Welsh, computing, history, modern foreign languages, religious education, PSE, business studies, sociology, leisure and tourism.	English, geography, art, design and technology, music, drama, physical education, history, health and social care, information technology, religious studies.

In the end of KS3 National Curriculum tests in 2002, the percentages of pupils gaining level 5 or above in science and English were just above the respective national average for both girls and boys. In mathematics, boys' results were just above the national average for boys, while those for girls were below the national average for girls. The percentage of pupils

achieving a level 5 or above in English, mathematics and science (the core subject indicator, CSI) was just below the average for Wales. The school has a free school meal index of 22% and according to the National Assembly benchmark evaluation, which compares schools of a similar profile, KS3 test results in English, science and the CSI were in the top 25 %, while those for mathematics were in the top 50%.

In 2002, the vast majority of the Y11 cohort entered the GCSE examinations in English, double award science and mathematics, and 80% entered the English literature examination. Almost all pupils entered attained grades A*- G. In science, the percentages of both girls and boys gaining the higher A*-C grades exceeded the respective national averages. In mathematics and English, the percentages of boys gaining grades A*-C was below the average for Wales. Results for girls in English equalled the national average for girls, while those for mathematics were just above. In Welsh, 60% of pupils entered either the short or the full course. All pupils entered gained grades A*-G in the full course and almost all gained grades A*-G in the short course. The percentage of pupils gaining grades A*-C in the full course was well above the average for the LEA and just above the national average. Results for girls exceeded the LEA and national averages, those for boys exceeded the LEA average but were below the national average. In the short course, the percentages of both girls and boys gaining grades A*-C were above the national average. The percentage of the cohort which gained the higher grades was just below the national average. Results for girls equalled the national average for girls while those for boys were below the national average for boys.

GCSE results have shown an improvement since the last inspection. The percentage of boys gaining at least 5 A*-C grades has increased from 40 % (in 1997) to 44% (in 2002) and girls' results have increased from 49% (in 1997) to 57% (in 2002). On the National Assembly benchmark evaluation, the percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades was in the top 25% and the percentages gaining 5 or more grades A*-G and 1 or more grades A*-G were in the top 50 %. The CSI (the percentage of pupils attaining grades A*-C in mathematics, English and science) was in the top 25%. In both 2001 and 2002, pupils demonstrate progress from KS3 results in many subjects.

In the 2002 A level examinations, students attained at least an E grade in all subjects entered. The percentages of both boys and girls gaining grades A-C and A-E were above the respective averages for Wales. At grades A-C, girls' results were well above the national average for girls. In the previous inspection, the average score for girls was 16, in 2002 it was 21; the average score for boys in 1997 was 17; in 2002 it was 17.

More able pupils make at least good progress in all subjects in all key stages. In science and religious education they achieve very good standards in all key stages. More able sixth form students make very good progress in most subjects.

Pupils of other abilities, including those with SEN, make at least good progress across the curriculum. Students in the sixth form, achieve very good standards in many subjects.

3.2 Standards achieved in key skills across the curriculum

Standards of achievement in communication and numeracy are good in all key stages. Standards of achievement in ICT are good in KS4 and the sixth form and satisfactory in KS3. There is little incidental use of Welsh in the daily life of the school.

Communication

In speaking, standards are consistently good in all subjects of the curriculum. They become very good in many subjects in KS4 and in the sixth form. Pupils are keen to respond to teachers' questions and can express ideas, reasons and opinions clearly and in detail, often giving fully extended answers. There is very good collaboration in pairs and groups in a majority of lessons across the curriculum. Pupils use specialist terminology accurately and confidently in many subjects.

Listening skills are very good. Pupils are attentive and focused in class, listening carefully to teachers, to each other and to audio-visual resources. They show respect for other people's views but also an ability to challenge and extend what they hear when necessary. Only rarely does a teacher have to repeat instructions or information or call a class to order. Interaction between teachers and pupils is very good across the curriculum.

In reading, standards are consistently good in all subjects and very good in the sixth form in a number of subjects. There is a range of effective support for those with reading difficulties and the great majority of pupils are able to read fluently and with understanding. Across the curriculum, they read a wide range of texts, both literary and informative, and can retrieve information from a variety of sources including CD ROMS and the Internet. Research skills are good. Good use of the library in the lower school enhances pupils' reading skills, but access to library facilities in the upper school is limited.

Writing skills are good in most subjects of the curriculum and are very good in a few subjects in the sixth form. Pupils produce relevant, well-organised and extended work in many subjects and can adapt their style to suit the audience and purpose of their writing. They increasingly understand the need to edit and revise their work so that standards of accuracy and presentation in final drafts are good. Projects in KS3 and coursework in KS4 and the sixth form are of good or very good quality. ICT is often used effectively to enhance the presentation of pupils' written work and contributes significantly to the good standards achieved.

Numeracy

Pupils benefit from the additional time devoted to teaching numeracy and to the regular practice of mathematical skills in Y7 and Y8.

In the sixth form, standards of achievement are very good in geography, design and technology, computing, and physical education. They are good in other subject areas. Students are able to interpret and analyse complex statistical data in a wide variety of appropriate contexts.

In KS3 and KS4, standards of achievement are good in almost all subjects. They are very good in information technology in KS4. Most pupils have a thorough understanding of number and can complete simple calculations in many subjects across the curriculum. They can measure and weigh accurately and use a range of units confidently. Across the curriculum, they collect and analyse data well from surveys and questionnaires, in a wide range of different contexts. In many subjects, pupils make good use of a variety of graphs to record and analyse data.

ICT

In the sixth form, standards of achievement are very good in design and technology and geography. They are good in almost all other subjects. Students make good progress in developing and applying a wide range of ICT skills across the curriculum. They have good access to computers and the Internet and make effective use of their opportunities.

In KS4, standards of achievement are very good in design and technology, satisfactory in mathematics, Welsh and modern foreign languages, and good in other subjects. Pupils confidently use a wide range of applications and skills in their work such as DTP, word processing, presentation, measurement, CAD/CAM and Internet research. ICT is used successfully in composing in music, digitising in art and evaluating activities in physical education and drama.

In KS3, standards of achievement are good in about half the subjects of the curriculum and satisfactory in the others. Pupils develop good skills in communicating, handling and modelling information in their taught IT lessons but these are not applied well in many other subjects. Across the curriculum, there are instances of ICT skills being developed and applied for a range of purposes but the ICT experiences of a significant minority of pupils in KS3 are insufficient.

Pupils in KS3 and KS4 make good use of computers at lunchtime, but ICT work outside lessons is insufficiently directed by subjects.

4. ETHOS OF THE SCHOOL

4.1 Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

The ethos of the school is a major strength and reflects a clear sense of shared values. All concerned with the school work together to create an atmosphere where pupils can develop as individuals and as members of a wider community. The school is a caring community where all are valued. Pupils' spiritual development is good and their moral, social and cultural development are very good.

Pupils' spiritual awareness is developed in religious education and in many subjects across the curriculum. Pupils have good opportunities to consider their own and others' beliefs and values. They are confident to relate and reflect on their experiences and offer personal responses through discussion. They respect the views of others and value their opinions. The Christian Society organised by sixth form students makes a valuable contribution to this aspect. Regular assemblies are held in year groups in the lower school and in different combinations of years in the upper school. Assemblies are of a Christian nature, pupils participate in a number of them and music creates an appropriate atmosphere. Pupils respond well to opportunities provided for them to reflect on appropriate themes. Assemblies successfully reinforce the school's values and celebrate achievement. On the days when pupils do not attend an assembly, a 'thought for the week' forms part of the tutor period. This does not occur in all tutor periods so that the school does not meet the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

Pupils' moral development is well planned and is successfully developed in many areas of the curriculum. Pupils have a very clear sense of right and wrong and show respect for each other, their teachers, other adults and the environment. In a range of subjects, pupils respond sensibly when discussing issues like racism, prejudice, human rights, the environment, economics and other moral and ethical issues. Through their enthusiastic support for a great number of local and national charities, pupils of all abilities show a sense of responsibility towards others less fortunate than themselves.

Pupils' social awareness is successfully fostered through a large number of activities in the curriculum and extra curriculum in the school and the wider community. Relationships throughout the school are very good. Pupils are very friendly, helpful and cooperate very well in lessons and other activities. Sixth form students are very actively involved in supporting younger pupils and organising events in the school and community. Pupils across the age range work well together. The school council, the prefect system, work experience, industry days and extra curriculum activities all make valuable contributions to developing self reliance and the ability to show initiative. Those who represent their year groups in the school council show maturity and confidence and their observations and suggestions are taken seriously.

There is a very good range of extra curricular activities which extends pupils' personal, social and cultural development. Pupils benefit from regular visits to museums, art galleries, theatres and other places of interest. There is a good range of sporting activities which are well supported. Many pupils, of all abilities, participate in school productions, the choir and musical events. A number of pupils are involved in the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. An awareness of issues relating to living in a multi-cultural society is well developed. Pupils are given the opportunity to appreciate and study cultures different from their own and show respect for people with different traditions, culture and beliefs. The school is successful in promoting racial equality. The European dimension is very well developed through modern foreign languages and successful visits to European countries. An understanding of the culture and heritage of Wales is effectively developed by the Welsh department and more than half the subjects of the curriculum. There is a successful school Eisteddfod and activities are undertaken in conjunction with the Urdd.

4.2 Behaviour and attitudes

Standards of behaviour and attitudes towards learning are consistently very good throughout the school and this makes a positive contribution to standards of achievement and quality of life in the school. Parents are appreciative of the values which the school promotes.

The school has effective strategies for establishing and maintaining high expectations and standards of behaviour as a platform for pupils' education and personal development. The responsibilities of all concerned with the school are clear, well understood and implemented effectively. The leadership team, teaching and support staff and the effective pastoral support system all make important contributions to the very good behaviour achieved. Pupils respond positively to the strong leadership so that relationships between adults and pupils throughout the school are very good.

Pupils of all abilities and ages relate well to one another. Social behaviour at the start and end of school day, break and lunchtimes is orderly even though corridors in the upper school are

narrow and constricted. Movement of pupils between lessons is orderly and responsible and no time is wasted between classroom transfers.

Pupils' attitudes towards learning are very good. Pupils are well motivated, concentrate, exercise self-discipline and apply themselves readily in lessons. The merit system operates effectively. Social inclusion measures are particularly pro-active with much support for pupils considered to be at risk, with special provision to support disaffected pupils. Every effort is made to resolve problems and assist pupils facing difficulties as problems are identified quickly. Good use is made of specialist external agencies in supporting young people when necessary. The school's anti-bullying procedures are implemented effectively and parents and pupils are confident that the school reacts promptly when allegations of bullying arise. Sixty-four pupils were suspended temporarily but there were no permanent exclusions in the year preceding the inspection.

4.3 Attendance

The average attendance over the three terms preceding the inspection was just below 90%. This is unsatisfactory.

Improving attendance is a priority in the school and there is an appropriate range of measures to do so. Pupils and parents are made aware of the school's expectations of good attendance and the practice of taking holidays in school time is strongly discouraged. There is effective first day call when pupils are not in school. There are whole school and class targets and rates of attendance are prominently displayed around the school. Good attendance is rewarded and there are compact arrangements in both lower and upper schools. Form registrations are carried out efficiently and accurately at the commencement of the school day and afternoon sessions and pastoral teams are ably supported by highly efficient administrative staff. Attendance registers meet statutory requirements. Heads of year and assistant heads of year, are conscientious in following up attendance and there is close monitoring of pupils' attendance daily and weekly. There are regular, effective meetings with the educational welfare officer. Attendance is recorded in lessons in all subjects. Subject teachers also review patterns of absence and there are effective strategies to ensure pupils complete missed work on their return to school. Nevertheless, a significant minority of pupils have periods of long term absence or patterns of intermittent absence and this adversely affects their standards of achievement.

A significant minority of pupils arrive after the beginning of morning registration in the upper school. Pupils are punctual arriving at lessons and the school day operates efficiently and punctually.

5. QUALITY OF EDUCATION

5.1 Teaching

The quality of teaching is a major strength of the school. It is satisfactory or better in 100% of classes and good or better in 91%. These figures greatly exceed targets set by the National Assembly for the year 2002 for the quality of teaching in 95% of classes to be at least satisfactory and 50% good or better. In 20% of classes there is teaching of very good quality and this occurs in all key stages. The quality of teaching is better in the sixth form (97% good

or better) than in KS3 (86% good or better) or KS4 (91% good or better). In 34% of classes in the sixth form, the quality of teaching is very good. In the previous inspection in 1997, the quality of teaching was good in 59% of classes in KS3, 64% in KS4 and 79% in the sixth form.

In KS3, the quality of teaching is good in all subjects across the curriculum. In KS4, the quality of teaching is very good in English, drama, religious education, religious studies and geography. It is good in all other subjects. In the sixth form, the quality of teaching is very good in English, design and technology, information technology, history, geography, art, music, drama, religious studies and physical education. It is good in all other subjects.

Teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach and are fully aware of current initiatives. Planning is detailed, very thorough and covers the programmes of study of the National Curriculum, the requirements of external examination specifications and progression through the key stages. A number of departments have made good progress in planning to build on work covered in year six (Y6).

Opportunities for delivering key skills are identified in schemes of work. There is a good range of activities employed to ensure pupils develop the skills of communication and numeracy, especially in KS3. These include the use of key words, project work to ensure pupils research and select information for themselves and develop skills of extended writing, and lessons with a specific focus on developing graphical skills. Strategies to develop ICT across the curriculum are implemented well in KS4 and the sixth form but inconsistently in KS3.

Classroom organisation is consistently good. In almost all lessons there is an atmosphere conducive to learning and relationships are very good. Lessons are very well planned and have clear objectives which are shared with pupils so that they are effectively involved in their own learning. A good range of resources is well planned and used effectively to generate interest and provide a variety of experiences. Classes are well managed and practical activities are organised effectively. Presentations, paired and group activities are used very well to ensure that pupils share ideas and tasks and develop their understanding. The quality of paired and group work is very good in the majority of subjects.

The range of teaching techniques used in lessons is consistently good and lessons are well structured. Lessons begin with an effective recapitulation of earlier lessons, there is a good sequence of activities and the final recapitulation ensures objectives have been achieved. Pupils' knowledge and understanding are checked by questioning and in many lessons pupils further develop their understanding when very skilful questions provide sufficient opportunities for them to reflect on their ideas.

Activities are well matched to individual pupils' needs and previous achievement. Teachers build effectively on existing knowledge and understanding and activities and resources are adapted to provide pupils of different abilities with challenging activities. Extension activities are often used effectively for more able pupils while pupils with SEN have full access to the National Curriculum. Teachers' expectations are high, lessons proceed at a brisk pace and accuracy is stressed in language and thinking. Teachers give freely of their time to provide pupils with extra support and to cover work lost through pupils' absence.

In the sixth form, teachers meet students individual needs and challenge them to achieve their potential. They employ effective strategies to facilitate students' independence, ensure students work accurately and analytically and develop skills of evaluation.

5.2 Assessment, recording and reporting

Assessment, recording and reporting are good. The whole school assessment policy provides a useful framework for individual departments' policies and assessment procedures. A full range of assessment techniques is used. Assessment is accurate, consistent and linked to National Curriculum criteria in KS3 and to examination criteria and grades in KS4 and the sixth form. Teachers use a variety of assessments with clear criteria and there is often effective moderation within departments. In KS4 and the sixth form, pupils are aware of the progress they are making in terms of examination grades. In KS3, pupils are aware of National Curriculum level in a number of subjects but in others National Curriculum levels are not used until Y9.

The use made of assessments to improve standards of achievement is good but there are shortcomings, particularly in KS3. Teachers mark pupils' work, including homework, regularly. They follow departmental policies and identify attainment marks and effort grades. Pupils understand the system. Teachers usually provide useful oral feedback to individuals and to the whole class. The effectiveness of teachers' written comments is inconsistent across the curriculum. There are very good examples, particularly in KS4 and the sixth form, of detailed comments identifying strengths and weaknesses and how to improve, in other books comments are too general. All departments have procedures for pupils to assess their own progress and set targets for improvement but the use of self-assessment to involve pupils in their own learning is fully effective in only a minority of subjects. Pupils are insufficiently aware of their strengths and weaknesses and what they must do to improve in terms of the specific requirements of the different subjects.

Arrangements for recording pupils' achievement and progress are very good. The whole school system to track pupils' progress is computerised and is effective throughout the school. Departments record results of assessments throughout the year and there is a twice yearly record of pupils' progress recorded across the curriculum. Consequently, there is a detailed record of an individual pupil's progress from KS2 onwards, as well as a record of CATs and NFER data. The complex analysis allows the identification of pupils making good progress and those who are underachieving. Summative records are provided for heads of year and form tutors and an individual pupil's attainment is tracked effectively across the curriculum. There is effective intervention from subjects and the pastoral system for pupils who are underachieving and mentoring and other support are provided at an early stage. Parents are fully informed of both good progress and underachievement by letter.

Reports to parents are good. The school meets statutory requirements. Parents receive one full report annually and the timing is well matched to parents evenings so that there is at least one contact with parents every year. Heads of year make good use of short reports. Annual reports have a standard format and are well structured. They give parents a comprehensive view of pupils' development. Each subject evaluates attainment, effort and general progress, and provides additional comments on strengths, weaknesses and future targets. The usefulness of teacher comments varies across the curriculum. Teachers' comments are sometimes very good. They are subject specific, note strengths and weaknesses and set effective targets for improvement; in others the targets set are too general and focus too

greatly on effort. Reports at the end of Y9 identify pupils' attainment in National Curriculum levels. Pupils do not have the opportunity to set their own targets on the reports.

The school is making good progress in implementing its plans to develop an effective formative review of progress through progress files. Pupils in Y8 work on school-based self evaluation files which will eventually feed into pupil progress files by Y9. The current Y7 and Y9 are the pilot years for the new pupil progress files which will supersede the RoA system, still being used in KS4 and the sixth form. Final documents are well produced and contain relevant information of academic and wider development and there is a ceremony to celebrate their distribution. There is very good review of the progress of pupils with SEN.

The use made of the analysis of internal assessment and external examination data is very good at whole school and departmental levels. The data used includes information from primary schools, CAT and NFER scores, KS2 and KS3 scores and levels, and two internal assessments each year. Whole school and departmental challenging targets are set for raising achievement in KS3, KS4 and the sixth form. There is detailed analysis when targets are not met, gender and other equal opportunities issues are considered and national data is used for comparison.

5.3 Curriculum

The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets all statutory requirements for the National Curriculum and religious education throughout the school. Curriculum organisation makes a very positive contribution to meeting the school's commitment to equip pupils with knowledge, understanding and skills together with moral, spiritual and cultural understanding. Curriculum provision is effective and inclusive, offering pupils of all abilities equal access and opportunity. Pupils with SEN in KS3 and KS4 have access to the National Curriculum, to accredited courses in KS4 and to vocational programmes. They enjoy good support for integration into the full life of the school including extra curricular activities. Those in the designated SEN groups in KS3 and KS4 are, however, insufficiently integrated into subjects where they could develop their social skills more effectively. There is an appropriate provision of an alternative curriculum for a small number of pupils in KS4. There are no modifications or disapplications from the National Curriculum. The school curriculum meets the recommended 25 hour teaching week.

In KS3, the curriculum meets the needs of pupils of all abilities. Subjects are generally allocated an appropriate number of lessons although in design and technology time is low. Pupils in the designated SEN groups, which remain together for all lessons, have less time for Welsh and French than other pupils. Pupils are taught mainly in mixed ability groups although there are limited setting arrangements in English, Welsh and mathematics. In Y7 and Y8 there is a separate lesson for drama while in Y9, drama is integrated into English lessons. IT has a designated lesson in each year of KS3. Literacy, numeracy and PSE are taught in a single lesson rotation in Y7 and Y8. In Y7, one class is taught Spanish instead of French for the first time this academic year. The practice of withdrawing pupils with SEN for additional literacy lessons is successful in improving their skills in literacy but reduces their time in other subjects. There are effective curriculum links with primary schools developing in many subjects.

In KS4, the organisation of the extended core curriculum ensures pupils have access to English, English literature, mathematics, Welsh, science, physical education, PSE, and

religious education. The vast majority of pupils in KS4 study double award science; in Y10 a small group follows the single award course. All pupils study either history, geography or religious studies. The majority also study a modern foreign language. Pupils can choose from a further two option columns, giving them the opportunity to study subjects such as business studies, child development and catering which are new to them. The provision widens their choice and allows them to fulfill the requirements of the National Curriculum and pursue their own interests. The curriculum provision and good guidance ensure that pupils have a balanced curriculum; however, only a designated group of lower ability pupils have access to the vocational GCSE courses. There is a successful building trades course taught mainly at the local college of further education. There is a good take-up of subjects across the curriculum. About three quarters of Y11 pupils move on to further education, either in school or in a college.

In the sixth form, the school offers a choice of over twenty AS and A2 courses to GCE level. Students make their choices from five option groups, which allows for diverse combinations of subjects. There is continuity from KS4, and the opportunity to follow new courses in computing, sociology, AVCE health and social care and GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism. Y12 students are able to resit GCSE English and mathematics, and Spanish is introduced as a new GCSE course. Many students study four subjects to AS level, often reducing to three at A2. Students in Y12 have timetabled lessons for key skills in either communication, application of number or IT in which they gain accreditation at either level 2 or 3. The percentage of students continuing their studies from Y12 to Y13 is high. In both Y12 and Y13, students follow a well planned entitlement programme that includes religious education, physical education, PSE, careers education and guidance and Internet and website development. Y12 students give at least 20 hours over the year to a community action programme which they organise themselves. Students enthusiastically set about activities which include working with the less fortunate and the elderly, paired reading, 'buddying', games coaching, IT teaching in primary schools and many other activities. Many students continue these activities in Y13. The programmes are successful in broadening and enriching students' experience and prepare them very well for citizenship and adult life.

Work experience is well managed and is timetabled for a week in Y11 but not all Y12 students undertake work experience. There is a wide range of work-related experiences, including enterprise activities, technological challenges, mentoring by business personnel, talks and visits, often related to curriculum activities. These are well supported by the local EBP. The ACCAC framework for work-related education for 14-19 year olds in Wales is being implemented.

Arrangements for PSE are effective. PSE is taught on a rotation in Y7, Y8, and the sixth form. In Y9 and KS4 pupils are withdrawn from mainstream lessons and the timetable is suspended regularly. The PSE programme is well planned with appropriate content and continuity, including careers education and guidance and all aspects of health education. It fully meets the requirements of the PSE framework.

Planning for the development of the key skills of communication, numeracy and ICT across the curriculum is very good in all key stages. Planning for the development of Cwricwlwm Cymreig is good. Schemes of work are detailed, cover the requirements of the National Curriculum, provide good guidance for teaching and learning and continuity and progression between the key stages. Homework is set regularly and provides appropriate opportunities for pupils to extend and consolidate their work. All pupils and students have a homework diary,

which many use well to manage their learning and homework. Homework diaries provide a useful means of communication between the school and parents. There is no homework timetable, which occasionally results in too much or too little homework being given.

The extensive programme of extra curricular activities organised by the school is very good. Pupils enrich and extend their learning through a wide range of extra-curricular events that includes musical, sporting, cultural activities, trips and links with other countries and many links with the community. Pupils respond well to the wide range of facilities and support available to continue their studies out of school hours or attend supervised homework clubs. Extra curricular activities do a great deal to broaden experience, improve standards of achievement and increase self-confidence.

5.4 Support, guidance and pupils' welfare

The quality of support and guidance and the procedures for promoting pupils' welfare are very good. The school's pastoral system is very effective and plays an important role in ensuring that the school is a community and a secure environment where hard work and mutual support are valued. Academic and personal progress are carefully monitored and pupils are helped to achieve their full potential. Pupils are proud of their school.

Pastoral organisation consists of heads of lower and middle school with heads of year and assistant heads of year for each year group, and a head of upper school also with an assistant head. These effectively manage a team of form tutors. A member of the leadership team is linked with each section to oversee the pastoral programme. Communication between members of the pastoral teams is good and there are regular meetings of all concerned. A house system offers a good incentive for pupils across the year groups to collaborate and to compete in sporting, cultural and other competitive events.

On entry to the lower school, pupils are placed in mixed ability tutor groups and remain with the same form tutor during Y7 and Y8. In Y9, they move to the upper school building and a new form tutor who remains with them until the end of KS4 as far as is possible. The lower school provides a very effective bridge between the primary school and Y9. Good liaison arrangements exist to support the transition from Y8 to the upper school. Form tutors meet their forms each morning and afternoon for registration. In the lower school, there is a weekly form tutor period which increases to two tutor periods in the middle school. Tutor periods are used to check attendance, monitor uniform, and the use of homework diaries, complete pupils' self evaluation, progress and RoA files and carry out day to day administration. Relationships between form tutors and their pupils are very good. Form tutor periods are often used well. The use made of homework diaries is generally effective.

Pupils in Y8 work on school-based self evaluation files which will eventually feed into pupil progress files by Y9. The current Y7 and Y9 are the pilot years for the new pupil progress files which will supersede the RoA system, still being used in KS4 and the sixth form. Set tutorial periods are introduced to ensure the effectiveness of these systems and these are well used. The school's reward system raises the profile of academic achievement and pupils value the half-termly commendations on the Honours Board.

Staff give their own time generously to support pupils who need additional subject teaching both during lunch breaks and after school, and pupils appreciate this help. The school also has very good arrangements for mentoring pupils identified through the monitoring system

from Y7 onwards. Members of the leadership team, sixth formers and mentors from outside agencies all provide valuable support. Pupils concerned find this mentoring useful. The school has a strong focus on social inclusion and the SEN coordinator is also the inclusion coordinator. Effective strategies are in place to support those who need specific help.

Support for sixth formers is very good. The monitoring of students' academic progress by form tutors in conjunction with subject teachers is thorough and regular and leads to the setting of effective individual targets for improvement. Teachers provide very good support in individual subjects and students make good use of the study and leisure facilities available to them. They respond well to opportunities to gain accreditation in key skills. The school encourages students to take on responsibility, both as part of the prefect system and by taking part in the community service programme which is a compulsory element in the Y12 timetable. They do so with enthusiasm and commitment, provide a good role model for younger pupils, and develop social skills, self-confidence and increasing independence. They are well prepared for life in the wider world. The contribution made by the sixth form to school life is significant and represents a strength of the school.

The school council is effective in enabling pupils from all year groups to discuss a wide range of issues and to help improve the quality of school life. Meetings are held each half term, chaired by the head boy or girl, with a link teacher who communicates concerns and ideas to the head teacher, the leadership team and the staff as a whole. Pupils value the system and feel that they have a voice in the school.

The school's PSE programme is taught throughout the school by specialist teachers and external providers in a variety of ways: as part of a carousel, by withdrawal from lessons, through days when the timetable is suspended for particular year groups, through appropriate subjects of the curriculum and through the use of record of achievement /progress files. A group of sixth form students has been trained to provide additional information and advice about drugs misuse. Schemes of work are detailed and comprehensive and the programme is fully in line with the ACCAC Framework. The quality of the programme is good.

The quality of careers education and guidance is good. The programme is well planned to develop pupils' skills and understanding and to provide relevant information and objective advice. It is well integrated into the PSE and work experience programmes and begins in Y7. The programme includes activities to enhance self awareness and development, to increase knowledge of career opportunities and career planning. Pupils and parents value the programme and almost all pupils have a good understanding of potential job opportunities and their requirements. Y12 students undertake effective mock interviews but there are no mock interviews for pupils in KS4. There is a very good relationship with the careers advisor who conducts interviews with pupils from Y9 onwards and attends parents' open meetings. There is a well attended and successful careers convention organised by the school in conjunction with the careers company. The careers library contains relevant up to date information but pupils do not make sufficient use of the facilities.

Partnerships with external agencies including social workers, the EWO and the educational psychology service are good, and a school nurse visits the school to monitor pupils' health and to contribute to the PSE programme. A team of first aiders among the staff has up-to-date qualifications and there are good links with the nearby hospital. Pupils looked after by the local authority have appropriate care plans and personal education plans are currently being put in place.

The school's arrangements for child protection fully meet statutory requirements. Procedures for ensuring pupils' health and safety are good, though a few areas of concern were identified to the head teacher during the inspection.

5.5 Provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN)

The provision for pupils with SEN is good and the school's response to the requirements of the Code of Practice is very good. Pupils are fully integrated into the life of the school and have full access to the National Curriculum and to accredited GCSE, CoEA and vocational courses. There is a small group of pupils with SEN identified in each year which is taught mainly as a separate group either by specialist teachers or by SEN teachers. There is good collaboration between subject specialists and SEN staff and pupils make good progress across the curriculum. In KS4, pupils have access to GCSE, vocational and CoEA courses. They are integrated into form groups, have access to extra curricular activities but are integrated into only a small number of subject areas.

Specific programmes to improve literacy skills are effective. Teachers listen to pupils reading during registration, there is a toe by toe reading scheme and an integrated computerised learning programme. The programmes are carefully graded and suitable strategies are used to help pupils with their individual difficulties. Detailed records are maintained and these show that pupils are making good progress. The small group of pupils withdrawn for extra help with their reading and spelling are making good progress. They follow appropriate programmes of work and activities support mainstream work well.

Twenty two pupils with specific learning difficulties receive additional support from an LEA specialist teacher. They make good progress. They follow relevant individual programmes of language skills and develop useful strategies to improve their work. While the provision is successful, the withdrawal of pupils from subjects hinders continuity and progression when they return to the full provision.

In mainstream classes, subject teachers are responsible for providing and presenting suitable work within their areas. The SEN coordinator distributes relevant information together with individual educational plans (IEPs) to promote this process. The information is used effectively to adapt materials, methods and support to meet identified needs. There is very good liaison between identified link teachers and the coordinator.

Six learning support assistants (LSAs) offer good support to small groups and individual pupils mainly in the small special classes. They provide continuity and help avoid difficulties with pupils' educational work. Subject teachers and assistants usually cooperate closely. LSAs maintain good records of the effectiveness of activities undertaken and this information is shared with the coordinator. This is very good practice and enables the SEN coordinator to monitor the provision across the school.

Eight pupils have statements of SEN which is a very low number. Statements are reviewed effectively, appropriate targets are set and parents, external agencies and the LEA are consulted effectively. Thirty one pupils are recorded on the school action plus stage and 308 on the school action stage. The arrangements to identify pupils who need help are good and the register of SEN is reviewed thoroughly. All pupils needing extra help have an appropriate

IEP which identifies clear targets and appropriate strategies to achieve them. Targets are reviewed three times a year and parents are fully involved in the review process.

The coordinator offers very good leadership and is well supported by the assistant coordinator in the lower school. The support rooms are attractive, very well organised, and there are good records of progress. There are very good links with the contributory primary schools and external agencies. The head teacher and the designated governor are very supportive of the provision.

5.6 Partnership with parents and community, schools and other institutions

There is a well planned and effective approach to developing links with parents, the community, schools and other institutions and liaison is very good. The extensive range of partnerships makes a valuable contribution to the ethos and values of the school and to standards of achievement and personal and social development.

The quality of information provided for parents about the work of the school is comprehensive and very good. The very high quality prospectus contains much valuable information. The prospectus and governing body's annual report to parents comply fully with National Assembly requirements. There is very good information and support for pupils and parents as pupils prepare to make important decisions in Y9, Y11 and the sixth form. A home/school agreement is well established and there is regular and effective contact with parents by means of circulars, newsletters and personal contact.

Arrangements for parents to visit the school to discuss their children's work are effective and include an open evening for each year group and open evenings to meet specific needs. Attendance is good and is carefully monitored by the school. In addition, the school operates an 'open door' policy whereby parents are able to visit the school at mutually convenient times to discuss any concerns. The 'Friends of Cyfarthfa' provide valuable support in fund raising and other activities. Public events and activities held at the school are very well supported by parents but parents are not involved directly in activities within the school.

There is a strong community ethos in the school. Numerous links with the community are used to enhance pupils' experiences in such subjects as physical education, music, drama, religious education, geography and PSE. The school is outward looking and is aware of its responsibilities to the local and wider communities. Y12 students undertake community service in a wide variety of placements. A community education worker is located in the school to develop social education provision and activities and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.

The very good partnerships with the feeder primary schools are a particular strength of the school provision. Arrangements for receiving Y6 pupils into the lower school begin in Y5 and are extensive and very thorough. Pupils settle down well, feel they are well prepared and are familiar with teachers and the lower school before they arrive. They appreciate the induction programme which is organised for them. There is a strong commitment to the interchange of ideas with feeder primary schools and numerous curriculum initiatives and joint projects are becoming established in a wide range of subjects.

Links with other local comprehensive schools and FE colleges are effective and there are very good links and compact arrangements with local higher educational establishments.

There is a well-established partnership programme with initial teacher training institutions and trainee teachers are regularly trained at the school. There are additional links with schools and educational establishments outside the UK and these play an important part in raising pupils' awareness of wider global issues.

5.7 Partnership with industry

Partnerships with industry, commerce and the world of business are well established and are very good. Pupils' economic and industrial understanding, awareness of the world of work and curricular experiences are greatly enhanced by the well planned programme. The school prepares pupils well for the world beyond school.

The policy and strategies provide clear direction and the ACCAC framework for work-related education for 14-19 year olds in Wales is being implemented. A comprehensive programme of activities is very carefully planned, monitored, evaluated and delivered through work experience, careers educational guidance, vocational courses, enterprise activities and numerous additional activities and opportunities.

Pupils from Y7 to Y13 undertake a range of activities and days to raise their awareness of industry. Y11 pupils undertake five days work experience placements annually and the range of placements is comprehensive. Pupils are well prepared and are well monitored by a team of teachers. Employers, pupils and teachers are fully involved in evaluating pupils' experiences and the work experience programme is very well managed. A number of students in Y12 undertake work experience placements which are more closely focused on the curriculum, their career plans and the requirements of higher education. Industrialists are directly involved with school programmes to mentor pupils in KS4 and undertake mock interviews with students in Y12. There are visits to industrial and business companies, enterprise days, homework clubs, revision projects, residential courses and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Industry and business are used effectively to enhance understanding in about half the subjects of the curriculum.

The school receives additional funding and valuable support from a number of organisations such as ELWa, Careers Wales, the Education Business Partnership and there are extensive links with local industries and businesses. The range and extent of teachers' placements in industry are satisfactory.

6. MANAGEMENT

6.1 Quality of self-evaluation and planning for improvement

The quality of self-evaluation and planning for improvement is very good. There is a clear focus on raising standards of achievement and a shared commitment to continuous improvement. A culture of self evaluation is very well embedded throughout the school. Action planning and reviewing procedures are very well established, fully understood and all staff and governors are effectively involved in their implementation. The school development plan is a core document; its construction and review provide an important focus for planning, monitoring and evaluating. It is a detailed document, which addresses a suitably wide range of aspects identified by previous evaluation and in response to current educational initiatives. All departments produce development plans which are well focused on the whole school

priorities and targets for improvement. The system provides sufficient flexibility for departments to address their own specific requirements. Development plans are reviewed regularly with link members of the leadership team and link governors are effectively involved in the process. All departments and areas undertake and record a detailed evaluation of progress. Development plans identify realistic targets, actions and responsibilities and are resourced in terms of money, staff, INSET requirements and time. Many success criteria are appropriately measured. Roles and responsibilities are clear and very well understood. Strategies are very effective, provide an informed basis for further improvement throughout the school and allow a prompt response to new educational initiatives and sharing of good practice.

Procedures to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of a comprehensive range of curricular and whole school activities and programmes are an integral part of the culture of the school. There is a three year planning cycle with an identified focus for monitoring and evaluating each year. Previous findings are regularly revisited to review progress. The monitoring and evaluating of teaching and learning have been particularly effective in recent years. The wide range of first hand evidence collected includes direct observation in the classroom, scrutiny of exercise books and schemes of work and parents and pupils are consulted effectively. Monitoring and evaluating exercises are built into the planning cycle and there is effective oral and written feedback. Whole school and departmental targets for improvement are set for raising attainment in KS3, KS4 and in the sixth form. Challenging targets are set, examination results are very thoroughly analysed, monitored and evaluated and all departments are very effectively involved in the process. The evaluation of departmental targets forms the basis of an effective annual review discussion with the head teacher. The whole school monitoring programme is very successful and the leadership team and other staff with whole school responsibilities have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Planning, monitoring and evaluating at whole school and departmental levels are very good.

The school improvement group provides an important focus for improving standards of achievement throughout the school. It is inclusive and allows staff to become involved in action research into identified topics. It is very successful in complementing review exercises undertaken elsewhere in the school, providing additional evidence and sharing information and good practice.

6.2 Leadership and efficiency

Throughout the school, there is a thoughtful commitment to what the school wants to achieve and a shared sense of common purpose. There is a very good understanding of whole school strategies and policies and a clear focus on raising pupils' achievement, maintaining high expectations and developing a community where individuals experience, recognise and celebrate success and behave responsibly. The school is successful in achieving its objectives.

The governing body contains a wide range of expertise. Governors are very well informed and show a very good understanding of strengths and weaknesses and of strategies to implement improvements. They are fully involved in financial decisions, the curriculum and in staff appointments. Procedures to link members of the governing body to members of the leadership team are effective and are successful in involving them in the school's self evaluation strategies and pastoral programme.

The school benefits from the clear vision and very effective leadership of the head teacher. He is very ably supported by the three deputy head teachers, three assistant head teachers and the SENCO, who together make up the leadership team. The leadership team displays a clear educational direction and a shared commitment to implement improvements. The school is very well organised. The quality of management of the leadership team, those teachers with whole school responsibilities and heads of departments is very good. Members of the leadership team have clearly defined whole school responsibilities as well as links to identified departments. Liaison with the departments is very good. This is particularly important since the school site is split into two. There are heads of lower, middle and upper school and key stages are divided into year groups with a head of year, an assistant head of year and a team of form tutors. Year teams work effectively together to support pupils and monitor their academic and pastoral progress. Communication between the departments and the pastoral teams is very good. There is, however, insufficient formal liaison between pastoral teams and the PSE coordinator.

Communication is very good throughout the school and whole school initiatives are very well coordinated. There are effective strategies to overcome the difficulties of the split site. There are regular newsletters, briefings and a planned programme of effective meetings at all levels. Teaching and support staff communicate and collaborate well so that the routine organisation of the school is very good.

The financial management of the school is very good. There is effective liaison between the leadership team, the finance sub-committee and other members of the governing body. Financial management is closely related to the priorities and activities identified in the school development plan. The head teacher and the deputy head teacher receive regular budget updates from the finance officer who is responsible for implementing the day-to-day running of the finance of the school. Budget summaries can be obtained instantly. The governing body and the finance sub-committee meet regularly and are actively involved in monitoring expenditure and financial decision-making. Astute financial decisions have been taken to ensure best value for money. The school income is augmented by the revenue generated by use of school facilities and services and the successful bidding for additional finance and resources from national and local sources.

Funding for departments is effective and includes departmental capitation and an extra bidding system, which is linked to the school development plan. Departmental heads receive instant breakdowns of expenditure and current balances from the finance officer. The few minor recommendations noted in the last auditor's report have been implemented. The efficiency and effectiveness with which the available resources are managed is very good.

6.3 Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

Staffing

Staff are a major strength of the school and are very committed to its success. There are 77 full time and 4 part time teachers at the school, to give a full time equivalent of 78.6. The pupil/teacher ratio is 18:1 which is about average for the size of school. Teachers are well qualified and almost all are graduates and have additional qualifications. There are 15 support staff: they include office and clerical staff, laboratory and workshop technicians. Non-teaching staff provide very effective support across a wide range of duties and responsibilities and make a very valuable contribution to the life of the school. Staff are very well deployed

to cover their curricular and pastoral roles. Non contact time is generally in line with responsibilities.

The INSET provision is very good. It is very well organised by a coordinator who is a member of the leadership team. All staff, both teaching and support staff are fully involved in the programme. INSET needs are identified by completion of departmental needs analyses which must address whole school and departmental development plans. They also arise from monitoring exercises and by consultation with individual staff. Training is carefully allocated to meet whole school priorities and needs identified by individuals and departments. The effect of INSET is at least good in all departments. There are many good, often very good, examples of new ideas and information being shared effectively and resulting in improvements in teaching and provision at whole school, departmental and individual levels.

There is a very good induction programme and teachers new to the school are very well supported by heads of departments and the INSET coordinator. The support offered to newly qualified teachers is very effective. Supply teachers are provided with clear information when they arrive at the school and are very well supported. The school has good links with initial teacher training establishments.

Accommodation

The school occupies two sites which are a few miles apart. Accommodation is satisfactory. It is sufficient to meet the curriculum and pastoral needs of pupils but there are shortcomings. Pupils in the lower school benefit from the special ambience which it provides but many rooms in the building are damp. Almost all subject rooms are arranged to allow good communication within the department but rooms in many departments, in both schools, are too small for the classes taught in them. The physical education changing rooms are too small. There is no specialised accommodation for drama in either the upper or the lower school. The hall and gymnasium in the upper school are used extensively for examinations so that they cannot be used for physical education or drama during that period. Activities in one music room are limited during examinations. Accommodation for the sixth form is satisfactory. Students have access to a social and a study area but these are small so that they use the upper school library to study. This reduces its effectiveness as a resource centre for pupils in KS4.

The school buildings are well maintained and procedures for dealing with site problems are efficient. Toilets are clean but in the lower school the fabric of the toilets is in an unsatisfactory condition. The school is free from graffiti and litter. Displays throughout the school are consistently good. Space in corridors is used very effectively to celebrate the wide range of school activities and pupils' achievements. Displays are particularly effective in informing pupils in both lower and upper schools of achievements and activities in the whole school. In departments, displays enhance the learning environment, provide a record of pupils' work and are often used effectively as a teaching tool.

Resources

The expenditure on resources is above the national average. The quantity and quality of resources across the school are good. The quality of study booklets and worksheets produced within the departments is good and often very good. Departments make good and often very

good use of a wide range of well chosen resources including a range of activities to improve pupils' understanding of work missed through absence.

Facilities for ICT are good. The ratio of pupils to computers is just below 4:1, which is below the national average and computers are up to date. ICT is used effectively in a number of subjects as a teaching aid in presentations and to help pupils evaluate their work. Sixth form students have good access to computers and the Internet and usually make effective use of their opportunities. In KS4, and especially KS3, there are sometimes problems experienced by some subjects in booking rooms.

The library in the lower school is open all day and is used extensively by the English department and by departments across the curriculum as a resource centre to support wider reading for information and pleasure. The stock of books is satisfactory but is below recommended levels. In the upper school, the stock of books in the library is unsatisfactory and is well below recommended levels. There is inadequate supervision to facilitate borrowing and monitor the use of resources. The upper school library is not used effectively as a whole school resource centre.

7. SUBJECTS AND AREAS OF LEARNING

Standards achieved by pupils

English

Standards of achievement are good in KS3 and in KS4. They are very good in the sixth form. In the results of National Curriculum tests in KS3 in 2002, achievement was just above the Wales average with 64% of pupils gaining level 5 or above. In the GCSE examinations in English and English Literature, 55% of pupils gained a grade at A*-C and almost all pupils gained a grade at A*-G. These figures are very close to the national average and represent good progress. In line with the national picture, girls performed better than boys in both examinations and the boys' result was slightly below the national average. At A level English Literature, all students gained a grade at A-C, a result which exceeded the national average.

Good features

KS3 and KS4

- Pupils demonstrate very good listening skills.
- They show very good attitudes to learning, maintaining concentration and focus.
- In paired and group work, they collaborate very well to explore texts, ideas and issues.
- Most pupils are confident and articulate and make appropriate use of standard English.
- They express ideas and opinions clearly and are keen to answer teachers' questions, often producing extended and detailed responses.
- Reading skills are well developed. Pupils can locate and reorganise facts, undertake research, predict outcomes and make inferences and deductions.
- They are increasingly able to appreciate writers' techniques and to analyse the way language is used for particular effect.
- Pupils respond well to a range of challenging texts.
- Pupils with reading difficulties receive very good support and make good progress.

- Written work is good overall and more able pupils consistently produce work of a very good standard. Their writing is extended, relevant, well organised and accurate.
- Pupils increasingly understand the need to edit and revise their written work so that final drafts of project work in KS3 and coursework in KS4 are of good quality.
- Competent use of ICT often enhances written work, especially in KS4, and standards of presentation are good overall.
- Pupils with SEN produce writing of a very good standard.

Sixth form

- Students are mature and thoughtful and committed to their studies.
- They collaborate very well in a range of group situations, participating in discussion, generating questions, challenging each others' opinions and putting forward cogent arguments, well supported by reference to text.
- They are able to undertake independent research confidently.
- They analyse text effectively and show very good development of the skills of literary criticism.
- Their written work is of very good quality being extended, detailed and well organised.

Shortcomings

- Many pupils in Y9 and KS4 do not read widely for their own enjoyment.
- There is a lack of security in spelling, punctuation and grammar in the day-to-day work of many pupils in KS3 and KS4.

Since the last inspection there has been good progress in improving standards of achievement in all key stages.

Mathematics

Standards of achievement are good in KS3, KS4 and the sixth form. In 2002, the percentage of pupils achieving a level 5 or more in the KS3 National Curriculum tests was 57.3%. This was below the national average but above the LEA average. Boys' results were just above the national average for boys, while those for girls were below the national average for girls. In the GCSE examination in 2002, almost all pupils who entered gained grades A* to G. The percentage of boys gaining grades A*-C was below the national average for boys, while results for girls were just above the national average for girls. Seven students entered the A level examinations. 75% gained A -C grades and all gained A -E grades. In all key stages, ICT is used insufficiently in a mathematical context.

Good features

KS3

- Most pupils are keen and enthusiastic and answer questions confidently. Their answers are clear and are usually accurate.
- They have a good understanding of whole numbers, fractions and percentages.
- They can perform calculations with angles related to straight and parallel lines, polygons and with bearings.
- They have spatial awareness and can calculate areas of regular figures.

- They understand the concept of probability and can perform simple calculations relating to the concept.
- More able pupils enhance their learning by completing extension examples provided for them.
- Pupils with SEN make good progress.

KS4

- Pupils can select appropriate methods to illustrate data graphically, by drawing and with the use of a computer.
- They have a sound knowledge of the units of length, area and volume.
- They can calculate areas of simple and compound plane figures and volumes of regular three dimensional objects.
- Most pupils use calculators appropriately and correctly.
- More able pupils understand vectors and can solve appropriate problems.

Sixth form

- Y13 students understand a range of concepts in all branches of mathematics and apply this knowledge in problem solving situations.
- Y12 students make progress in understanding aspects of pure and further mathematics, mechanics and statistics.

Shortcomings

- Less able pupils in KS3 and KS4 do not always complete their work. Presentation of work is inconsistent across the year groups.

Since the last inspection there has been good progress in standards of achievement in all key stages.

Science

Standards of achievement are good in KS3, KS4 and in the sixth form. Pupils of all abilities make good progress. More able pupils make very good progress in all key stages. In the end of KS3 National Curriculum tests in 2002, the percentages of boys and girls achieving level 5 or more was above the national averages for boys and girls respectively. In the GCSE examinations, almost all pupils who entered the examinations gained grades A*-G and the percentages of boys and girls gaining A*-C grades were well above the relevant averages for Wales. In the A level examinations, all students who entered gained grades A-E. In biology, 83% of students gained grades A-C, 82% gained the higher grades in chemistry and 17 % gained grades A-C in physics.

Good features

KS3 and KS4

- Pupils make good progress in knowledge and understanding across a wide range of topics. They have good recall of key scientific ideas across the attainment targets of the National Curriculum.

- They are able to apply key scientific concepts from current and previous topics to new situations.
- They often provide detailed explanations using scientific terms accurately in both their oral and written answers.
- They have a good understanding of the applications of science to their everyday lives and make good progress in understanding the issues related to health and the environment.
- They apply their knowledge and understanding to explain industrial examples.
- They make good use of text books and the Internet to research information when preparing posters, presentations and projects. They select and analyse information well.
- They collaborate naturally to share information and complete practical tasks.
- They are well organised and complete practical tasks safely and confidently.
- From Y7 onwards, pupils of all abilities make good progress in developing the skills of scientific investigation.
- They can plan an investigation and by KS4, include detailed scientific knowledge and understanding to support preliminary work and explain their reasoning.
- They measure and observe systematically and record accurately, using units correctly. They understand the need to repeat readings.
- They record their findings in tables and use appropriate graphs for analysis.
- Many pupils make good progress in evaluating their investigations. Evaluations are often detailed, with clear procedures for improvement.
- Pupils use ICT successfully to research information, and record, analyse and present data.

Sixth form

- Most students make good progress in developing an understanding of a wide range of topics in biology, chemistry and physics.
- They are confident to collect and select information from a wide range of sources. Files are usually well organised. Notes and extended writing are often of a good standard and explanations in oral answers are often detailed and accurate.
- Practical skills are good. Students complete complex practical investigations confidently, work accurately and analyse and evaluate results using graphical and mathematical skills.
- Students are confident to solve problems including those requiring mathematical solutions.

Shortcomings

- A small minority of students in the sixth form are less secure in applying their knowledge and understanding in problem solving.

Standards of achievement have improved since the last inspection.

Welsh second language

Standards of achievement in listening, speaking, reading and writing in KS3, KS4 and in the sixth form are good. Pupils enjoy their Welsh lessons and have a positive attitude to the language. In 2002, 60% of pupils entered either the short or the full course at GCSE level. All pupils who entered gained grades A*-G in the full course and almost all gained grades A*-G in the short course. The percentage of pupils gaining grades A*-C in the full course and the short course exceeded the national average. The percentage of the cohort which gained the

higher grades was just below the national average. Two students entered the A level examination and both gained grade B.

Good features

KS3

- Pupils make good progress in the skill of listening within the key stage. They listen well to their teachers, to cassettes and respond, using basic constructions with confidence.
- In paired and group tasks, they listen well to each other and answer questions and other points confidently. More able pupils respond with extended answers.
- Pupils speak well and more able pupils speak confidently and with a good degree of accuracy. They contribute effectively in group work, when speaking about a variety of subjects and are confident to report as individuals to the whole class.
- All pupils express opinions well. Pupils of average and lower ability give simple set reasons when asked for opinions while more able pupils are able to expand their answers and support their opinions with examples.
- They use a range of basic constructions, vocabulary and verb forms which are usually correct. More able pupils use a wide range of constructions, tenses and a good variety of vocabulary and phrases correctly.
- Pupils make good progress in reading within the key stage. They read aloud confidently in class, usually in an interesting and meaningful way. They read their own work and other short passages well and their pronunciation is good across the ability range. They understand short passages on familiar topics and respond well by answering questions both orally and in written form.
- Pupils usually write to a good standard, responding to a variety of stimuli. They usually use familiar patterns correctly and can vary the person and the tense of the verb effectively in structured work.
- Both more able pupils and those of lower ability produce extended writing for a range of purposes. They use ICT successfully to prepare displays in the classroom.
- The standard of accuracy and punctuation of more able pupils is good and they use constructions presented earlier in the key stage well.

KS4

- Pupils make good progress within the key stage and are usually able to understand a variety of spoken Welsh. They respond orally and in writing in a meaningful way.
- They work well in groups to complete set tasks, express opinions and use evidence. More able pupils discuss ambitious topics, like the problems of the young and expand on basic statements and opinions and use a range of vocabulary when discussing topics such as smoking and alcohol.
- Most pupils read to a good standard. When reading aloud, pupils' expression is clear and meaningful. They show good understanding of a range of material and respond well both orally and in writing.
- Pupils usually use a range of basic constructions and tenses correctly when writing tasks for their GCSE folio work. More able pupils respond to more challenging GCSE topics well and write with a good degree of accuracy. When expressing opinions they structure their arguments well and support these with evidence from their own experience.

Sixth form

- In Y13 students express themselves fluently and have the confidence to back their opinions with evidence from their own experience. They discuss poetry well, using appropriate vocabulary, phrases and terms associated with the appreciation of literature.
- In Y12 pupils are making good progress and generally cope well with the demands of the literature aspects of the AS course.
- Writing standards are developing well, both in Y12 and Y13. Students produce extended writing in response to specific areas of the AS and A2 course and creative writing of a good standard of accuracy.

Shortcomings

- More able pupils in KS3 are not challenged sufficiently to respond and discuss more demanding topics in group work.
- In KS3, most pupils do not read and respond to a sufficiently wide range of materials.
- Pupils of average and lower ability in KS4 make basic grammatical and punctuation errors in extended writing when the focus is not on grammar.
- When discussing ideas and opinions sixth form students are sometimes reluctant to respond at length without referring to their notes.

Since the last inspection the department has continued to make good progress.

Design and technology

Standards are good in KS3 and KS4 and very good in the sixth form in A level product design. In KS3, pupils are taught design and technology through resistant materials, textiles, food, and systems and control. In KS4, standards are good in GCSE textiles and graphic products. They are very good in resistant materials. Examination results in 2002 were above national averages for A*-C and A*-G in graphic products and well above national averages in resistant materials. No pupils sat the textiles examination in 2002. In A level product design examination results in 2002, all students gained grades A-E and 56% gained grades A-C. In recent years there have been regular successes in national competitions for innovative work.

Good features

KS3 and KS4

- Pupils have a sound understanding of a design process and apply it well in their project work. They understand the use of a specification in their designing and use it effectively in the evaluation of their projects.
- Making skills are good and sometimes very good. Pupils work accurately and produce a good finish. They work creatively with materials, particularly at KS4.
- Mechanical and electronic control principles are understood, and appropriately applied in project work.
- Pupils make good use of a wide range of ICT skills including CAD/CAM, design applications, research, microprocessor control and general applications. They use ICT for research, presentation, CAD and CAD/CAM very well in KS4.
- Pupils have a sound understanding of structures and are able to make load failure calculations.

- Pupils' knowledge and understanding of materials, components and their applications are good.
- Pupils' design presentation is good in KS3 and often very good in KS4.
- Less able and pupils with SEN make good progress through modified tasks and more able pupils are encouraged to develop their skills further through the use of extension tasks and open ended problem solving.

Sixth form

- Students research, analyse and produce effective design specifications to guide their product development. Their evaluation of the products they design and make is good.
- Project folios display high standards of presentation.
- Students make very effective use of ICT for research, CAD, CAD/CAM and presentation.
- Students effectively incorporate a wide range of materials into their work.
- Products are very well made and are often both innovative and creative.
- Theoretical work is good.
- Modelling skills are very good.
- Case studies, which are linked with commercial and industrial contexts, are well structured and evaluative.
- Quick creative drawing skills are satisfactory

Shortcomings

- In KS3 and KS4 pupils generate ideas insufficiently through quick drawing.

Since the last inspection there has been a significant improvement in standards of achievement across all key stages.

Information technology

Standards of achievement are good in KS3 and KS4. They are very good in the sixth form in computing. In 2002, about a third of the Y11 cohort entered the GCSE examinations, almost all pupils gained grades A*- G and results at A*-C were well above the national average. At A level, all students entered gained grades A-E and the percentage gaining the higher A-C grades was equal to the national average. There is good progress in introducing a vocational GCSE course in Y10.

Good features

KS3

- In Y7, Y8 and Y9 pupils make good progress in their development of IT competencies.
- Pupils manage computers effectively. They confidently conduct fundamental computer operations such as logging on, calling up and saving their work, and accessing appropriate applications and the Internet in Y7.
- Standards of communicating information are good. Pupils confidently combine text and images, and change and arrange fonts and layouts in appropriate combinations according to their designs.
- Design work is often good and results from the use of a wide range of communicating information techniques including power point presentations.

- Pupils are able to set up databases, understand terminology and carry out simple interrogations.
- They understand the function of a spreadsheet and are able to set up basic spreadsheets, conduct calculations and model number using appropriate formulae.

KS4

- Pupils develop a comprehensive range of IT skills in the minor project component of the GCSE course. They confidently communicate, handle and model information for a variety of purposes and audiences.
- Pupils' project work displays confidence in handling and modelling information using databases, and spreadsheets.
- Research, analysis and problem solving skills are often well developed. Pupils make appropriate use of the Internet to support their research.
- Pupils present their work well and are able to explain clearly why they have chosen specific IT applications.
- They have a good understanding of theory.
- More able pupils are challenged, and less able pupils and those with SEN make good progress through modified activities.

Sixth form

- Project work is often innovative, displaying evidence of effective analysis, investigation and problem solving. Students display confident programming skills in the solution of problems they have identified.
- Problem solving skills are often very good.
- Implementation and testing of computing solutions are well developed, particularly in those projects that are embedded in real industrial and commercial contexts.
- Students have a good understanding of theory and present their work well.

Shortcomings

- In KS3, pupils insufficiently consider social, economic, ethical and moral issues related to the use of ICT.
- In KS4, there are further opportunities for contextualised project development which will enhance opportunities for both research and evaluation.

Since the last inspection there has been an improvement in standards of achievement in all key stages

History

Standards of achievement are good in KS3 and KS4. They are very good in the sixth form. In 2002, almost 50% of the Y11 cohort entered the GCSE examinations. 78% of the pupils gained grades A*-C which is above the national average. Almost all gained grades A*-G. At A level, all students entered gained grades A-E and 94% gained grades AB.

Good features

KS3 and KS4

- Pupils in KS3 have good levels of background knowledge and understanding and their recall skills are secure.
- Pupils have very good listening skills; they are keen to achieve good standards in attaining the learning objectives and the key skills identified for them in every lesson. Pupils' oral skills are well developed, especially through the opportunities which they have of making presentations of their findings to their peers in class. Pupils speak fluently and articulately and use subject-specific vocabulary accurately and in the correct context.
- Pupils have good levels of chronological awareness and they have a good and sometimes very good ability to read and evaluate a variety of sources of historical evidence. They are successful in making meaningful links between the evidence and their own knowledge of the background of a topic.
- Pupils in KS3 are developing good investigative approaches in examining historical problems; they use sources of evidence intelligently to compare and contrast differing interpretations of historical problems and they provide good reasons to explain change over time. From Y7 onwards, pupils recognise that historical sources are often incomplete and that they can be used to produce different interpretations of a historical problem or issue.
- KS3 pupils become increasingly confident in identifying causation when seeking to explain changes occurring over time. By Y9, they can identify the significance of long-term and short-term causes for historical change and they are adept in tracing the consequences of those changes.
- The very good quality of pupils' group and paired work across the school has a significant impact upon the standards which they achieve. Pupils work collaboratively together and show much pleasure in developing their group discussions and responses. This is an important factor in encouraging pupils to take responsibility for their own learning and in making them confident and articulate independent learners; this is one of the strengths of the department.
- KS3 and KS4 pupils produce good and often very good quality written work; pieces of extended writing are neatly presented, well planned and logically argued. They record their learning in a range of styles and formats designed to appeal to different audiences, such as letters, reports, dialogue and essays. They select relevant material thoughtfully and organise their arguments logically and persuasively.
- In KS4, pupils successfully build upon the wide range of skills acquired in KS3; their oral and written work shows a growing maturity in the depth of their response and their insights into the motivation and attitudes of people in the past.
- Pupils develop good skills in testing their sources of evidence for bias, reliability and usefulness. They successfully detect propaganda in sources and are able to evaluate the reliability and usefulness of information which they uncover from the internet.
- They successfully apply their knowledge and understanding from other curricular areas, such as literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology to extend their historical and research skills and to enhance their learning in history.

Sixth form

- In Y12 and Y13, students have very good levels of knowledge and understanding of the historical debates related to the causes of the Civil War in 17th century Britain and to the political developments and problems associated with the rise of Nazism in Germany.

Very good quality debates and class discussions are evidence of wide reading and of a critical approach to the evaluation of the sources of evidence. Students can synthesise the views of the major professional historians of these periods and use their analytical skills effectively to explain the differences in interpretation found in their ideas.

- Y12 and Y13 students have a very good ability to use their knowledge and the evidence from the sources to construct opposing arguments when considering historical problems. Written work is often of very good quality. Essays and other written presentations are the result of careful research and thoughtful planning; pupils are increasingly analytical and self-critical in presenting their ideas and arguments.

Shortcomings

There are no significant shortcomings.

The department has made good progress in raising standards of achievement since the last inspection.

Geography

Standards of achievement are good in KS3 and very good in KS4 and in the sixth form. A significant proportion of the cohort is entered for external examinations. In recent years, GCSE results at the higher A*-C grades have been significantly higher than LEA and Welsh figures. At A level, percentages exceed national figures at both A-B and A-C grades.

Good features

KS3

- In KS3, pupils have a secure knowledge and understanding of the character and identity of Wales; they make good use of their knowledge in the study of other peoples and of countries in a widening range of contexts and scales.
- They acquire a range of skills and techniques, particularly those associated with the use and interpretation of maps, annotated diagrams and photographs; they improve their vocabulary of key words which they apply with increasing precision and which enhances their oral and writing skills.
- They have a keen understanding of movements of the earth's crust and appreciate that natural hazards such as earthquakes occur not only on plate margins but can also affect parts of Wales; they become aware of the dangers to local populations.
- They make good progress in developing the skills of geographical enquiry, benefiting from a good programme of fieldwork and visits both locally and further afield.

KS4

- In KS4, pupils consolidate previously acquired information; they have very good recall and understanding and their work shows the benefit of thorough independent research.
- They effectively link theory and practice as in their studies of named tourist attractions and handle primary and secondary sources of evidence competently; they use Welsh examples to develop and to apply their knowledge to areas on a wider scale.

- They are aware of inequalities in the economic development of countries, of the existence of shanty towns in less economically developed nations and of the need for social, economic and environmental change in areas such as the London Docklands.
- Examination candidates acquire skills in collecting, recording and evaluating their findings; they test hypotheses, reach substantiated conclusions and numeracy and graphical techniques are well used.

Sixth form

- Students respond to the high expectations of their teachers and work productively as individuals and in small groups; they possess very good learning skills and innovative learning situations enable students to respond constructively using an investigative approach; local field studies prepare students well for a future field visit to Austria.
- They have a growing awareness of the relevance of geography to environmental economic and social issues when researching both tectonic processes and their effects and natural hazards associated with climatic environments.
- They understand that the growth of urban populations leads to stresses on resources such as housing, transport and waste disposal and that natural rates of population change vary globally over space and time.

Shortcomings

- The progress of a small number of pupils in KS3 and KS4 is hindered by absence.
- Pupils are sometimes more confident orally than in writing; others are uncertain in the use and spelling of more complex terminology and are reluctant to contribute to class discussions.

The department has made good progress since the last inspection. Standards of achievement have improved in all key stages.

Modern foreign languages

Standards of achievement are good in KS3, KS4, and in the sixth form, in French, German and Spanish. The school enters a higher proportion of the year group for French at GCSE than the national average, and all pupils gain an A*-G grade. In previous years, the percentage of the year group gaining an A*-C grade has been equal to or higher than the national average. In 2002, the percentage of pupils gaining the higher grades fell to below the national average. Of the small number of pupils taking German, 85.7% gained an A*-C grade. In the 2002 A level examinations, the one student entered for German gained a grade D. All four of the students entered for French gained grades A–C.

Good features

KS3 and KS4

- Pupils listen well to authentic recordings, to the teacher, and to each other.
- They understand the language they hear and respond appropriately.
- They grasp new language quickly and have a good recall of vocabulary.
- They are confident speakers; pupils across the whole ability range, boys as well as girls, are keen to take part in oral work.

- They speak in full sentences, with a good accent.
- Where standards are very good, pupils are exceptionally confident in oral work; they show initiative in using the language and a real desire to communicate.
- Reading comprehension skills are good; pupils understand the gist of reading passages and can pick out relevant details.
- Pupils across the whole ability range carry out a range of writing tasks successfully, including extended writing.
- They regularly adapt the language they know to write about their own opinions and ideas.
- The standard of GCSE coursework is good. The more able produce coursework of a very high standard.
- Pupils have a good understanding of the relevant grammar.

Sixth form

- Listening comprehension is good. Students concentrate and listen well to the spoken language; they respond quickly to what they hear and persevere when they meet difficulties.
- Students are generally keen to speak, and use the foreign language for incidental class exchanges.
- They can initiate and sustain a conversation and do not need to be prompted to give extended answers.
- A small number of students are exceptionally fluent and confident and show outstanding initiative in conversation.
- Students read aloud fluently, with good pronunciation, and understand a wide range of written material.
- Students write at length on a wide range of topics. They can all express their own opinions and develop their ideas coherently, with increasing accuracy and range of language.
- Students have a good understanding of grammar and the majority can transfer this knowledge to their own writing, with few major errors.

Shortcomings

- In KS3 and KS4, pupils do insufficient reading for their own pleasure and enjoyment and to develop independent reading skills. They do not regularly use the target language for routine classroom exchanges.

Since the last inspection, standards have improved considerably, particularly in speaking and writing. There are now no classes where standards are unsatisfactory.

Art

Standards of achievement are good in KS3 and KS4, and very good in the sixth form. In the 2002 GCSE examinations, pupils entered for an art and design or graphic design option. All pupils entered gained grades A*-G. The percentage of pupils gaining the higher grades A*-C equalled the national average in art and design and was well above the national average in the graphic design option. At A level, all students gained grades A-C. In all key

stages, pupils benefit from working with artists-in-residence and from visiting art galleries. This results in their having a wider knowledge of historical and contemporary art.

Good features

KS3

- Pupils make progress in developing their observational drawing skills.
- They develop good painting skills and learn how to use colour well.
- They show a good awareness of art of other cultures in both two- and three-dimensional activities.
- They develop an appreciation of the art of Wales.
- They develop good graphic design skills.
- They learn and use an appropriate art vocabulary when speaking and writing about art.
- Pupils are developing individual opinions and judgement about art.

KS4

- Observational drawing in line and tone is good.
- Pupils demonstrate good graphic design skills in topics that hold their interest.
- Sketchbook work is creatively developed.
- Pupils develop three-dimensional skills in new media imaginatively.
- They know how to use computers to create artwork and to research artists.
- They are developing good independent research skills.

Sixth form

- Observational drawing is very good.
- Students are developing as individual artists, producing work that shows much creativity and individual flair.
- They produce practical work that would often be associated with a higher level.
- Craft skills are developed very well.
- Experimental sketchbook work is done with some panache.
- The good practice of self-review and regular group presentations of work is resulting in confident students who know how to improve their work.
- Students use computers very creatively.

Shortcomings

- In KS3, pupils do not use computers sufficiently to create artwork.
- In KS4, pupils do not organise their practical work sufficiently for themselves.

Since the previous inspection, there has been good progress and the weaknesses identified in the previous report have been rectified.

Music

Standards of achievement are good in KS3 and KS4. They are very good in the sixth form. In 2001, 10 candidates entered for the GCSE examinations; all achieved grades A*–C. At A level, the six candidates who entered all achieved grades A–C. In 2002, 5 candidates entered

for the GCSE examinations, 80% gained grades A*–C. At A level, the four candidates who entered all gained A - C grades.

Good features

KS3

- Pupils can demonstrate technical competence and accuracy, appropriate to their development, in both vocal and instrumental performance.
- They perform confidently on a number of instruments, with expression and sensitivity.
- They communicate effectively, showing a sense of style and occasion.
- Pupils explore a range of sound sources from which they select, combine and arrange sounds effectively, imaginatively and with musical expression.
- They improvise and create complete compositions in response to a variety of stimuli and produce outcomes which are musically interesting.
- They appraise their own and others' music perceptively, focusing on specific elements and evaluating the effectiveness of their use.
- They acquire musical knowledge, skills and understanding by direct engagement with the elements of music through practical activities.
- They make progress through regular practice in these activities, and by evaluating their own work and that of others.
- They apply what they have learned in a range of contexts.
- They use I.C.T. to improve the quality of their music making.

KS4

- Pupils build on previous experiences, further developing their skills, knowledge and understanding and increasingly take responsibility for their own learning.
- They show further control in performance.
- They create and develop musical ideas in relation to given briefs, with much success. Completed compositions show effective use of instruments with colour and variety.
- They can appraise music with varying degrees of success, focusing on specific elements and are able to compare and contrast music of wide ranging styles and cultures

Sixth form

- Students take responsibility for their own learning with much success.
- They are able to express their ideas confidently both orally and in written form.
- They produce extended essays of a high standard, showing clear evidence of thoughtful planning and extended listening.
- They are able to perform confidently and convincingly to a high standard, paying detailed attention to tempo, phrasing and dynamics
- They are able to compose pieces that are musically interesting and satisfying. Musical ideas are well developed within a framework which demonstrates an understanding of balance, form and structure. The selection of voices, instruments and/or synthesised sounds demonstrates a sensitivity towards timbre and texture
- Students apply the knowledge gained through their study of twentieth century composers to other styles of twentieth century music

Shortcomings

- In group work in KS3, pupils sometimes fail to play in time to a common pulse, and show little empathy with other performers. Sometimes responses to improvisation are unimaginative and mechanistic.
- In KS4, the evaluations made by a minority of pupils in appraising music are brief and perfunctory, and do not focus on musical elements

Extra curricular activities complement the work of the department and good quality instrumental tuition is provided for 9% of the school population. The various extra curricular activities are successful in widening the musical experiences of many pupils and raise the profile of the school in the community.

Standards of achievement across all key stages have improved since the last inspection.

Physical education

Standards of achievement are good in KS3 and KS4, and very good in the sixth form. In 2002, 25 pupils entered the GCSE examination. All pupils who entered gained grades A*-D and 76% gained grades A*-C, which is significantly above the national average. In A level examinations 64% gained grades A-C and all students gained A-E grades.

In all key stages, participation levels are good and pupils are well motivated. They dress appropriately for practical work, work well alone, in pairs and in small groups and persevere to improve performance. They plan, observe and evaluate performance well and use teacher observation and feedback to good effect to improve personal performance. They are able to practice, repeat and refine skills to secure greater accuracy and control of their own work and that of a group performance. Pupils of all ages and abilities recognise and understand the importance of warming up and cooling down within physical activity.

Good features

KS3

- In Y7 and Y8 pupils are making good progress in games and dance.
- In Y9, skill levels and understanding are further enhanced through structured practical sessions which continue to challenge pupils. In volleyball, skills, knowledge and understanding are at a formative stage.
- In dance, boys with limited previous experience, enjoy the work, are gaining in confidence and are making good progress in developing their own movement vocabulary and observational skills. They are able to repeat set motifs with greater clarity and are sensitive to the ideas of others when planning and choreographing their work.
- Pupils in Y8 demonstrate good levels of skill and understanding in games when working alone and with others. They are good at receiving and passing a ball and can sustain these qualities when competition becomes more intense.
- They understand the benefits of an active lifestyle, the effects of exercise on the body and are keen to improve personal fitness levels.

- Pupils with special educational needs achieve good standards of achievement in gymnastics. They handle equipment well and are able to perform sequences with clarity and shape.

KS4

- Most pupils show technical proficiency in team games. In rugby, association football and hockey, pupils refine their skills through varied practices and improve their understanding. They show evidence of effective planning by thinking ahead, anticipating the response of others and cooperating well in small groups to outwit opponents. They have a good appreciation of rules, conventions and tactics of the games.
- Pupils are able to practice, repeat and refine actions with greater control and accuracy, and demonstrate increased efficiency and fluency in their work.
- They are able to sustain physical activity, and have an increasing knowledge of health related issues, training methods and skill development.
- Pupils following the GCSE course understand the physiological effects of exercise, and have a good grasp of contemporary issues in sport. They are gaining in confidence in their use of technical terms in answering questions both orally and in writing.

Sixth form

- AS and A2 course students display a mature and competent attitude towards the subject and make very good progress.
- All students work well in group situations, sharing ideas and supporting each other.
- They demonstrate a good knowledge and understanding of anatomy and physiology, exercise physiology and issues related to sport psychology. They can set up controlled experiments to test theories and are able to relate their findings to good effect in class discussions.
- Written work and assignments are often enhanced by good presentations using word processing skills.

Shortcomings

There are no significant shortcomings.

The school offers a good range of sporting activities which support curriculum provision and further enhance pupils' experiences. Staff give generously of their own time to this aspect of work which evokes a positive response from pupils of all ages and ability. School teams are successful and individual pupils go on to achieve representative honours at county, national and schools international level.

There has been good progress in standards of achievement since the last inspection in all key stages.

Religious education

Standards are good in KS3 and the sixth form and very good at KS4.

Good features

KS3

- Pupils across the ability range have a good knowledge and understanding of the units studied, and these reflect the requirements of the agreed syllabus.
- Pupils come to understand the authority that believers place on texts and religious traditions in their local community.
- They demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of religions and of what is distinctive to each of them and can explain in some depth what it means to be a Christian, Jew or a Muslim.
- Less able pupils have good knowledge of the main religions studied and respond sensitively and thoughtfully.
- Throughout the key stage, pupils are developing their investigating skills and show good skills in collecting information, organising and presenting it.
- By Y9 they have acquired a good conceptual framework which helps them to understand the specific religion they are studying and recognise the importance of religious beliefs for individual and communities.

KS4

- Pupils develop a very good knowledge and understanding of spiritual moral and social issues within their community and the world community.
- They apply their knowledge and understanding and form their own views of religious issues through an exploration of questions about life's meaning and purpose.
- They reflect very well on what they have learned and have confidence when expressing their own beliefs and values.

Sixth form

- Students develop a good understanding and knowledge of contemporary moral and social issues.
- They express and argue a position in group work, on moral issues and balance their views with others and show a religious perspective.
- They demonstrate sound social attitudes in their discussions and display respect, care and concern for others and the environment.

Shortcomings

- In KS3, the withdrawal of SEN pupils from one lesson a week disrupts the progress and limits their achievement.
- A minority of pupils' written work in KS3 is limited by absence.

There has been good progress since the last inspection. Standards of achievement have improved in KS3 and KS4 and a suitable course is provided in the sixth form.

Religious studies

Standards are very good in KS4 and in the sixth form. In 2002, almost all pupils who entered the GCSE examinations gained grades A*-G and the percentage of pupils who gained the higher A*-C grades was well above the national average. At A level, all students gained grades A-E and 89% gained grades A-C. Religious studies is becoming increasingly popular as an optional subject in KS4 and the sixth form.

Good features

KS4

- The pupils have a very good factual knowledge and understanding of the syllabus.
- They develop a very good range of skills that enable them to investigate religion and human experiences independently.
- They are developing good skills to enable them to evaluate and reflect on religious and moral issues.
- Pupils express their own views intelligently and at length and can support their arguments with relevant evidence.
- They produce lively and interesting written work, making clear connections between their own experiences of the world and the religious beliefs and practices they study.

Sixth form

- Students have a very good knowledge and understanding of the ways that ethical beliefs and practices approach issues that arise from contemporary experience.
- They discuss issues at an appropriate level, have good note-taking skills and produce written work with a relevant range of references.
- Their essays include discussion of the opinions of religious exponents and materials from appropriate sources, and the students gather and analyse information well.
- Students show a ready willingness to discuss, and support their opinions with thoughtful judgements and ideas.

Shortcomings

There are no significant shortcomings.

Since the last inspection, standards of achievement have improved.

Personal and social development

Standards of achievement are good in all key stages.

Good features

KS3 and KS4

- Pupils show care and consideration for others and their property.
- They listen attentively in different situations and respond appropriately.
- They can generate and take part in lively discussions.
- They maintain consistently good relationships.

- They work well as individuals, in pairs and in groups, showing a high level of collaboration.
- They show sensitivity to the feelings of others and a responsible and concerned attitude to the natural world. They can empathise with the experiences of others and evaluate another person's point of view.
- They increasingly understand the effects and risks arising from the misuse of drugs, including nicotine and alcohol.
- They are developing a responsible attitude to keeping their bodies healthy and active.
- They know what they believe to be right and wrong and recognise moral issues, showing good awareness of the problems of equal opportunities, bullying, racism and other aspects of anti-social behaviour.
- They have a growing understanding of their own aptitudes, interests and personal qualities which enables them to make informed choices about learning and future employment options.
- They make good use of the careers service.
- They review and reflect on their learning and performance, and are increasingly able to identify their strengths and weaknesses and to set targets for improvement.

Sixth form

- Students are disciplined and take responsibility for actions and decisions.
- They have respect for themselves and others.
- They can work both independently and cooperatively.
- They are committed to practical involvement in the life of the school and the wider community.
- They know the pattern of drug use in their community and beyond and know where to get information, help and advice.
- They know how to form supportive same sex and opposite sex relationships.
- They know how to review their learning and set targets for improvement.
- They use the school and the careers service effectively to identify relevant opportunities available to them in education, training and employment.
- They understand the need to plan for their financial futures as students or employees.

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

Business studies

Standards of achievement are good in all courses at KS4 and in the sixth form. In GCSE examinations, the percentage of pupils gaining grades A*-C has fluctuated, being above national averages in 2001, and below in 2002. In CoEA examinations, the majority of pupils have gained distinction or merit qualifications. In 2002, four students entered the A level examinations. All gained grades A-D and 75% gained A-C.

Good features

KS4

- Pupils have a good understanding of business terminology relative to their abilities, and can apply business principles to a range of tasks.

- The majority of pupils were able to appreciate the importance of effective recruitment strategies when appointing personnel to a business organisation.
- In Y11 GCSE classes, the majority of pupils were able to use their mathematical skills to carry out a balance sheet analysis and calculate current and acid test ratios.
- In the new Applied Business course, pupils are developing their portfolios well, and using appropriate business terms when studying the strategies used to price products.
- Pupils in the entry level classes are making good progress in the development of their tasks, and in the standard achieved in completed tests as part of the formal assessment of the course.

Sixth form

- In A/AS courses, students consolidate their understanding, and the majority can apply the more complex principles to a range of business applications.
- In Y12, the majority of students have a mature approach when discussing moral and ethical constraints on business decisions.
- Y13 students' projects are developing well, with evidence of detailed research and good use of secondary sources.
- In all classes, pupils maintain well organised and detailed files of work.
- ICT is used effectively at all levels to improve the standard of presentation, carry out independent research and display data.

Shortcomings

- In KS4, a significant number of pupils fail to complete their coursework.
- In A/AS classes, a small minority of students have a less secure knowledge and understanding of business terms and principles, and lack confidence in applying them in set problems and case studies.

The department has made good progress in standards of achievement in both key stages since the last inspection.

Child development

Standards of achievement are good. In 2002, all pupils who entered the GCSE examinations gained grades A*-G and the percentage gaining grades A*-C was well above the national average. Entry level results are satisfactory.

Good features

- Pupils investigate a range of issues relating to family life within a multi cultural society.
- They demonstrate a good understanding of the care and development of babies and young children and pupils following the GCSE course are able to make meaningful comparisons to statistical norms.
- Pupils carry out a number of perceptive observations of individual children and many produce thoughtful, well analysed judgements on their progress.
- There is good evidence of extended writing in class and child study folders. Currently these range from satisfactory to very good.

- Most pupils are able to research independently and produce reflective evaluations when they prepare for their prescribed tasks.
- Entry level pupils receive sensitive support and guidance and work produced is in line with their capabilities.
- Practical work is carried out in a range of materials; outcomes are colourful, imaginative and most are well finished.
- ICT is used well for presentation purposes.

Shortcomings

- Pupils do not always use the computer spell check facility.
- Pupils' experience is insufficiently enhanced by links with professionals in the community.

Child development was not a subject of the curriculum in the last inspection

Drama

Standards of achievement are good in KS3 and KS4 and very good in the sixth form. In 2002, all pupils in the small group entered for GCSE achieved a grade at A* to C. At A level, each of the seven students entered gained a grade A to D.

Good features

KS3

- Pupils are developing specific drama skills well. They understand and can demonstrate examples of tableau, freeze-frame and thought-tracking.
- They can develop characterisation through movement, gesture and facial expression.
- They collaborate effectively to plan, rehearse and present their silent images.
- In discussion of issues such as bullying they generate and express ideas clearly, listening attentively to the teacher and to each other.
- They can evaluate the performance of others.
- They respond imaginatively to literary and graphic stimuli.

KS4

- Pupils continue to collaborate effectively to plan, rehearse and present their work.
- Improvisation skills are good.
- Pupils move well and display a good sense of timing.
- They present character and situations convincingly using movement, dialogue and good voice control.
- Pupils work confidently and with enthusiasm.
- They are aware of their own and others' strengths and weaknesses and can evaluate performances seen, both at school and elsewhere.
- In their writing in role, pupils show good understanding of character.

Sixth form

- Students are mature and talented, imaginative and confident.
- They demonstrate very effective use of control and status techniques.
- They pay attention to significant detail in creating tension in devised relationships.
- Movement, facial expression and voice projection are very good.
- They can interpret a sub-text using a very good visual vocabulary.
- They make informed and perceptive evaluations of their own and others' performances.
- They can sustain a role convincingly in a hot-seating exercise.
- They show a good knowledge of stagecraft.
- They are committed to the subject and are very willing to give their own time to extra drama work.

Drama was not a subject of the curriculum at the last inspection.

Sociology

Standards of achievement in Y12 and Y13 are good. In the 2002 A level examinations, all students who entered gained grades A-E and 57% gained grades A-C.

Good features

- Students have good levels of knowledge and understanding and their recall skills are secure. They can make appropriate links with relevant contemporary attitudes and social developments.
- Students develop a good command of the methodology and conceptual basis of the subject. They successfully use a variety of methods of sociological enquiry and research. Good use is made of the locality in developing research skills, for instance in constructing questionnaires and in using the information gained to draw reasonable conclusions upon which to base arguments.
- Students use sociological terminology accurately and in the correct context. They can offer good explanations of sociological theories and ideas and develop articulate speaking skills during their group and class debates.
- By Y13, students develop their analytical and evaluative skills more confidently when considering a wide range of sociological problems and issues.
- Students produce good quality written work. Essays are well planned and logically argued; they are securely based upon a wide range of sociological data and relevant source material. Students make good use of relevant evidence to back up and justify their conclusions and judgements.

Shortcomings

- A minority of students do not provide adequate illustrations and relevant examples from their reading to ensure that they justify the points they make in their written work.

Standards of achievement have improved since the last inspection.

Catering

Standards of achievement are good. In 2002, all pupils who entered the GCSE examinations gained grades A*-G and 65% gained grades A*-C.

Good features

- Pupils gain a sound knowledge and understanding of food outlets and the various roles within a catering organisation.
- They experience using large scale equipment via work placements and occasional visits to local catering establishments. Here they gain first hand information which they record well in their coursework projects.
- Pupils have a good awareness of health and safety procedures and most follow these when they plan and carry out practical work.
- Making skills are good. Pupils are able to plan and prepare relevant food items in groups or for personal use. They use tools and equipment confidently and competently.
- Y10 pupils experience large scale food preparation when they work in teams to prepare food items for school functions.
- Pupils use catering terminology appropriately in class tests and practical assignments.
- ICT is used by some pupils to present coursework.

Shortcomings

- Pupils use ICT insufficiently as an integral part of lesson activities.

Catering was not a subject of the curriculum in the previous inspection.

Vocational education

Two vocational courses are on offer in the Sixth form, an intermediate GNVQ course in leisure and tourism, and an AVCE course in health and social care.

Leisure and tourism

Standards of achievement are good. Grades awarded to students who complete the course units have been good with many gaining the higher levels.

Good features

- Students gain an understanding of the role of leisure and tourism in today's society and are aware of the importance of marketing in the industry; they have a detailed knowledge of marketing research, targets and the marketing mix.
- They possess good background knowledge of the vocational context and of the importance of good customer service to different types of customers who often pay for products and services and expect to be treated well.

- Investigations and role-play simulations give them further insight into customer needs; they appreciate that organisations need to ensure staff are provided with appropriate training to deal with dissatisfied customers.
- They work productively as individuals and in small groups and can relate their current studies to realistic commercial settings; they access relevant information from a wide range of sources and make good use of personal experiences and visits to centres of employment and recreation.

Shortcomings

- The work of a small minority of pupils lacks sufficient detail with important points not fully developed; a few individuals are reluctant to contribute to group discussions.

Standards of achievement have improved since the last inspection.

Health and social care

Standards of achievement are very good. In 2002, all ten students gained A–D grades.

Good features

- Students have a secure knowledge and understanding of the vocational area, and a positive attitude to learning.
- They can relate the work they do in class to realistic health and social care settings, often drawing on the experiences gained through visits and work placements.
- Students complete assignments and projects successfully, making effective use of the skills of planning, research and investigation.
- They use ICT as a tool to improve the quality of their assignments. The use of images to complement the written work is impressive and very effective.
- They take responsibility for their own learning, making appropriate arrangements to gather primary evidence, by interviews, visits, placements, etc.
- They work effectively individually and in teams showing motivation for sustained and productive work.
- Students demonstrate good levels of competence in communication, numeracy, ICT, problem solving and working with others.
- Many students are able to provide critical analyses of complex health and social care issues in real situations and produce portfolios of a very high standard.

Good progress has been made in standards of achievement since the last inspection.

Building Skills Foundation Course

Standards of achievement are good. The course is mainly taught at the local college of further education.

Good features

- Practical skills in basic building and plastering are well developed.
- Basic woodwork skills are good.
- Finishing skills in a range of materials are good.
- Marking out and measuring are accurate.

Shortcomings

- Pupils' understanding of the theory of materials and processes is underdeveloped.

Building skills was not a subject on the curriculum in the previous inspection.

8. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

8.1 Progress since the last inspection

The previous report identified eight key issues for action. There has been progress made in addressing all the key issues. Progress in key issues one, two, five and eight has been very good. There has been good progress in issue three and satisfactory progress in the remainder.

1. Improve the accuracy of written work, particularly spelling; raise the standard of presentation, especially handwriting; increase the amount and breadth of reading; raise confidence in oral work and make more use of talk as a tool for learning.

Standards of achievement in listening are very good; standards of achievement in speaking, reading and writing are good.

2. Increase the range of teaching and learning strategies, particularly in those classes where there is a wide range of ability, in order to match work more closely to the individual needs of pupils and to provide more pace and variety to activities.

There has been a considerable improvement in the quality of teaching since the last inspection. Activities are well matched to individual needs and previous achievement and a good range of resources is used effectively to provide a variety of experiences. Teachers' expectations are high and lessons proceed at a brisk pace.

3. Devise strategies to make pupils more independent as learners so that they develop research skills, make more use of the library, and check their own work to improve it.

Research skills are now good and pupils increasingly understand the need to edit and revise their work. The library in the lower school is used extensively by the English department and by departments across the curriculum as a resource centre to support wider reading for information and pleasure. The upper school library is not used effectively, however, as a whole school resource centre. There is further work required in this key issue

4. Develop further strategies to improve attendance rates and punctuality by pupils and strengthen the support for them on return to school.

Improving attendance is a priority in the school and there is an appropriate range of measures to do so including effective strategies to ensure pupils complete missed work on their return to school. Nevertheless, a significant minority of pupils have periods of long term absence or patterns of intermittent absence and this adversely affects their standards of achievement. This remains a key issue for action.

5. Give due attention to the weaknesses identified in a small number of classes in modern foreign languages, art, music and physical education.

There have been considerable improvements in standards of achievement in these subjects since 1997 and standards of achievement are at least good in all key stages.

6. Extend the use of information technology so that all subjects meet National Curriculum requirements and provide pupils with opportunities to use the computer as a resource for learning.

ICT facilities have been increased and updated since the previous inspection. Standards of achievement in ICT are good in KS4 and the sixth form and satisfactory in KS3. In KS3, there are instances of ICT skills being developed and applied for a range of purposes but the ICT experiences of a significant minority of pupils in KS3 are insufficient. There is further work required in this key issue.

7. Improve the degree of guidance given by teachers in pupils' marked work, involve all pupils in self assessment and identify strengths and weaknesses in subject skills and set targets for improvements in reports to parents.

There are targets for improvement identified in reports. There are very good written examples, particularly in KS4 and the sixth form, of detailed comments by teachers identifying pupils' strengths and weaknesses and how to improve. In other books, however, comments are too general. All departments have procedures for pupils to assess their own progress and set targets for improvement but the use of self-assessment to involve pupils in their own learning is fully effective in only a minority of subjects. Pupils are insufficiently aware of their strengths and weaknesses and what they must do to improve in terms of the specific requirements of the different subjects. There is further work required in this key issue.

8. Enhance the spiritual development of pupils by rectifying the shortcomings in the provision for religious education in KS4 and the sixth form, and by improving the current pattern of school assemblies each day for all pupils through the use of music, singing and more active participation of pupils in the acts of collective worship.

This key issue has been fully met. However, on the days when pupils do not attend an assembly a 'thought for the week' forms part of the tutor period. This does not occur in all tutor periods so that the school does not meet the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

8.2 Key issues for action

The head teacher, staff and governors should build on improvements already achieved. In order to improve the good standards of achievement and quality of provision that already exist, they should:

- Improve attendance.
- Extend the good practice that already exists in the school by fully implementing development plans to:
 - Raise standards of achievement in ICT across the curriculum in KS3*
 - Improve pupil self assessment so that pupils identify their strengths and weaknesses more effectively and understand what they must do to improve their standards of achievement.*
- Develop the library in the upper school as an effective whole school resource.
- Ensure that the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship is fully met.

Aspects of key issues identified with an asterisk are in the school development plan.

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	Cyfarthfa High school
School type	LEA maintained
Age -range of pupils	11-18
Address of school	Cae Mari Dwn, Queen's Road, Merthyr Tydfil,
Post-Code	CF47 0LS
Telephone Number	01685 721 725

Headteacher	Mr A Pritchard
Date of appointment	Jan 1996
Chair of Governors/ Appropriate Authority	Mr D Lewis
Registered Inspector	Mrs A Powell
Dates of inspection	10- 2 -03 to 14-2 -03

B. School data and indicators

<i>Number of pupils in each year group</i>									
Year group	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13	Y14	Total
Number of pupils	264	252	225	212	223	124	92	9	1404

<i>Total number of teachers</i>			
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time equivalent (fte)
Number of teachers	77	4	78.6

<i>Staffing information</i>	
Pupil:teacher (fte) ratio (excluding special classes)	18:1
Pupil:adult (fte) ratio in special classes	11:1
Average teaching group size	21.8
Overall contact ratio	75%

<i>Percentage attendance for three complete terms prior to the inspection</i>								
	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13	Whole school
Term 1	92.57	91.69	90.06	88.05	91.56	89.61	91.62	90.88
Term 2	87.65	83.28	83.88	83.5	92.39	80.14	85.79	85.23
Term 3	90.68	90.1	90.23	90.1	88.92	90.22	73.89	87.73

Percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals	22%
Number of pupils excluded during 12 months prior to inspection	64 temporary

C. Results of National Curriculum assessments and public examinations

National Curriculum Assessment KS3 results: 2002															
Total number of pupils in Y9: 212															
Percentage of pupils at each level															
			D	A	N	W	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	EP
EN	Teacher assessment	School	0	1		0	0	3	7	27	31	19	11	0	
		National	0	1		0	0	3	10	22	34	21	8	0	
	Test	School	0	4	2	0	-	-	8	24	29	19	14		
		National	0	3	2		0	0	9	22	33	19	10	0	
MA	Teacher assessment	School	0	0	0	0	0	1	8	26	23	28	13	0	
		National	0	1	0	0	0	1	10	23	25	26	13	1	
	Test	School	0	8	1	-	0	0	8	25	17	32	9	0	
		National	0	6	1	0	0	0	8	22	22	27	13	0	
SC	Teacher assessment	School	0	0	0	1	0	0	13	23	28	23	10	0	
		National	0	1	1	0	0	1	10	24	31	23	9	0	
	Test	School	0	5	1	0	0	0	6	22	25	27	14	0	
		National	0	4	1	0	0	0	9	22	29	24	10	0	

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:	50	In the school:	48
In Wales:	51	In Wales:	50

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

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

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

W - Pupils who are working towards level 1

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

For pupils aged 15, results in GCSE, CoE, GNVQ and NVQ			
Number of pupils aged 15 on the school roll in January 2002: 202			
The percentage of 15 year old pupils who in 2002:			
	School	UA	Wales 2001
were entered for 5 or more GCSEs	84	80	86
achieved 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C	51	35	50
achieved 5 or more GCSE grades A*-G	83	76	85
achieved GCSE grades A*-C in each of mathematics, science, English or Welsh first language)	40	28	37
entered at least one CoE, GCSE short course or GCSE	97	97	96
achieved one or more GCSE grades A*-C	77	61	73
achieved one or more GCSE grades A*-G	93	89	92
achieved no graded GCSE	4	7	5
achieved one or more CoE only	3	3	2
achieved a GNVQ Part 1, a GNVQ at Foundation level or NVQ level 1	0		
achieved a GNVQ Part 1, a GNVQ at Intermediate level or NVQ level 2	0		
achieved at least 5 GCSE grades A* to C, the equivalent vocational qualifications or a combination of both	51		
achieved at least 5 GCSE grades A* to G, the equivalent vocational qualifications or a combination of both	83		

For pupils aged 16, 17 and 18, results in A/AS, GNVQs and NVQs			
Number of pupils aged 16, 17 and 18 in January 2002: 84			
Number of pupils entered for 2 or more GCE A level examinations or equivalent in 2002: 77			
Number of pupils entered for fewer than 2 GCE A levels or equivalent in 2002:14			
	School	UA	Wales
Percentage of pupils entered who achieved 2 or more grades A-C	75	61	62
Percentage of pupils entered who achieved 2 or more grades A-E	100	95	93
Average points score per candidate	20	17	18
Number of pupils who achieved a GNVQ Intermediate or NVQ at level 2	3		
Number of pupils who achieved a GNVQ Advanced or NVQ at level 3	10		

D. The evidence base of the inspection

In total, 283 classes were inspected. Many form registrations, assemblies and extra-curricular activities were observed. Most teachers were seen teaching two or more times and there were planned discussions with senior staff, heads of department, external personnel as well as many other teaching and non-teaching staff.

Inspectors scrutinised written and other work in all subjects across the curriculum of a representative sample of able, average ability and less able pupils from each of years 7 to 13. Subject inspectors also saw a large amount of written and other work when they visited classrooms, workshops and laboratories. There were discussions with pupils both in the classroom and during the lunchtime on their work and other aspects of school life.

The substantial and very well-presented documentation provided by the school was analysed before and during the inspection and formed the basis of pre-inspection planning and meetings. Further documentation provided by the school during the inspection week also contained valuable information. The registered inspector held pre-inspection meetings with the school staff, the governing body and parents to explain the inspection process and obtain their views on aspects of the school. An analysis was made of the 116 responses to questionnaires as well as comments received from parents and others. These all informed inspection planning.

E. Composition and responsibilities of the inspection team

Team member	Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
A. Powell	Science , biology, careers	Main findings Standards of achievement Standards in key skills Quality of teaching Attendance Self-evaluation and planning for improvement Leadership and efficiency Staffing, accommodation and learning resources Progress since last inspection Key issues for action
H. Evans	Religious education.	Pupils with SEN, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
M. Page	English, drama	Communication. Support and guidance. Sixth form coordinator. PSE coordinator
A Edwards	Mathematics	Numeracy Assessment, recording and reporting, support efficiency.
S Gale	Design and technology, IT	ICT, curriculum, support accommodation and resources.
J.H.James		Support PSE Sample of classes Behaviour and attitudes, support attendance Links with industry, educational establishments and the community
T Lewis	Welsh	
M. Herbert	Design and technology, catering, child development	.
D Mason	English, drama	
G Holland	Modern foreign languages.	
A Newman	History , sociology.	
E Forster	Art	
A Woods	Modern foreign languages	
E Bowyer	Geography, leisure and tourism	
S Williams	Music, health and social care GNVQ coordinator	
A. Caughter	Physical education	
G Davies	Science, physics, business studies	
A T F Woods	Science, chemistry	

