

**Inspection under Section 10 of the
Schools Inspections Act 1996**

**Mountain Ash Comprehensive School
New Road,
Mountain Ash
CF45 4DG**

School Number: 6744053

Date of Inspection: 06/02/06

by

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8205**

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The purpose of Estyn is to improve quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

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- * secondary schools;
- * special schools;
- * pupil referral units;
- * independent schools;
- * further education;
- * adult and community-based learning;
- * youth support services;
- * LEAs;
- * teacher education and training;
- * work-based learning;
- * careers companies; and
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Mountain Ash Comprehensive School was inspected as part of a national programme of school inspection. The purpose of inspection is to identify good features and shortcomings in schools in order that they may improve the quality of education offered and raise the standards achieved by their pupils. The inspection of all schools within a six-year cycle is also designed to give parents information about the performance of their child's school.

The inspection of Mountain Ash Comprehensive School took place between 06/02/06 and 10/02/06. An independent team of inspectors, led by Miss Glynis Owen undertook the inspection. Estyn, a statutory body independent of, but funded by, the National Assembly for Wales, commissioned the inspection.

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

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

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

There are three types of inspection.

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

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

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

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

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

This school received a standard inspection.

Year groups and key stages

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

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

Primary phase:

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

Secondary phase:

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

The National Curriculum covers four key stages as follows:

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

Contents	Page
Context	1
Summary	2
Recommendations	6
Standards	7
Key question 1: How well do learners achieve?	7
The quality of education and training	11
Key question 2: How effective are teaching, training and assessment?	11
Key question 3: How well do the learning experiences meet the needs and interests of learners and the wider community?	14
Key question 4: How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	16
Leadership and management	17
Key question 5: How effective are leadership and strategic management?	17
Key question 6: How well do leaders and managers evaluate and improve quality and standards?	19
Key question 7: How efficient are leaders and managers in using resources?	20
Standards achieved in subjects and areas of learning	23
Mathematics	23
Science	25
Information technology	26
History	28
Business studies	30
Child Development	31
School's response to the inspection	33
Appendices	34
A Basic information about the school	34
B School data and indicators	34
C National Curriculum assessments results	35
D Evidence base of the inspection	38
E Composition and responsibilities of the inspection team	39

Context

The nature of the provider

1. Mountain Ash Comprehensive School is an 11-18, co-educational community school in Rhondda Cynon Taff. There are 1140 pupils on roll, compared to 1179 at the time of the last inspection in January 2000. Of these, 129 are in the sixth form, an increase of nearly 20.
2. Pupils come from the small town of Mountain Ash and its adjacent villages. The area is economically and socially disadvantaged, with only a small minority of pupils coming from advantaged backgrounds. Over 30% of pupils are entitled to free school meals, compared to 15.7% nationally. There are very few pupils from minority ethnic heritages.
3. Pupils' scores in the national curriculum (NC) tests prior to entry are below the national average. Ten pupils have statements of special educational need (SEN) and a further 174 have been identified as needing some support. This is a smaller proportion than nationally. English is the first language for over 99% of pupils.
4. The school is a member of the Cynon Valley consortium for post-16 education. Students attend courses at this and other schools, and at the local college.
5. The headteacher, deputy and three assistant headteachers were in post at the time of the last inspection. Two assistant headteachers have been appointed since then, both from within the school.

The school's priorities and targets

6. The school focuses on 'Motivation, Achievement, Challenge and Support', forming this motto from the initial letters of its title.
7. Its school development plan for 2005-2008 has six priorities:
 1. Learning Skills and Learning Outcomes;
 2. Teaching and Assessment;
 3. Curriculum;
 4. Ethos;
 5. Care and Support; and
 6. Leadership and Management.
8. Numerical targets are also set, for the school, for departments and for individual pupils. In each of the next three years:
 - 60% of pupils should reach at least level 5 in each of the core subjects at key stage (KS) 3, and nearly half should reach this level in all three subjects combined;
 - Over 40% of pupils should gain at least five grades A*-C in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations; and

- Over 80% of pupils should gain at least five grades A*-G.

Summary

9. Mountain Ash Comprehensive School has a strong community focus and sense of purpose. Pupils receive very good support in a safe and caring environment and standards have risen since the last inspection. The experienced and effective senior management team and the staff have a commitment to further improvement, amongst which is the need to continue to work with parents to raise whole-school attendance.

Table of grades awarded

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

10. These grades match the school's self-evaluation grades in key questions 1-6. Inspectors awarded a grade higher in key question 7 because they judged there to be outstanding features.

Standards of achievement

11. Results in the NC tests at the end of KS3 and in the GCSE examinations improved steadily from the time of the last inspection until 2004. Whilst below national averages, results were above average in comparison with schools of a similar intake and sometimes placed the school among the top 25% of schools. In 2005, for several reasons, results fell at both key stages.
12. At Advanced (A) level, results have remained consistent in recent years, below local and national averages, but the percentage of students gaining a pass grade has improved.

13. In the six subjects inspected, the following grades were awarded:

Subject	KS3	KS4	Sixth form
Mathematics	2	3	3
Science	3	3	2
Information Technology	2	2	2
History	2	2	2
Business Studies	-	3	3
Child Development	-	2	2

In the 73 lessons observed in these six subjects, the following grades were awarded:

Key Stage	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
KS3 & KS4	5%	54%	35%	6%	0%
VI Form	8%	84%	8%	0%	0%
Total	6%	59%	30%	5%	0%

14. These grades meet the Welsh Assembly Government target for 2007 for 65% of lessons to be graded 1 or 2, but do not quite meet the target for 98% of lessons to be graded 1, 2 or 3. They are very similar to the grades awarded in all inspections in Wales in 2004-2005.
15. Pupils' key skills were observed in these lessons and in all other subjects. Standards in key skills have improved considerably since the last inspection, particularly writing. In subjects other than the six inspected, there were consistently good standards in communication in particular, especially at KS3. The school has recently had its Basic Skills Quality Award renewed.
16. When teaching is good or outstanding, pupils of differing abilities all make good progress. This is evident in most classes in most subjects of the curriculum. Small-group teaching for pupils with SEN results in good standards.
17. There is strong performance at GCSE in a number of subjects which were not among the six inspected. A good measure of value has been added to pupils' prior attainment in art, geography, music, information technology, vocational courses and, recently, drama. The short courses in Welsh second language, religious studies and physical education have also been successful.
18. In the development of pupils' personal, social and learning skills, particularly good features are:
- the confidence with which pupils and sixth-form students speak to visitors about their work;
 - the good standards of behaviour in most classes and pupils' generally mature response to being allowed to stay in the building at all times; and
 - pupils' loyalty to the school and respect for diversity within the school and within society.

19. The most significant factor which impacts, adversely, on standards achieved is pupils' sporadic and longer-term absence. A significant number of pupils and students from all age and ability groups miss lessons, work and assessments and fail to reach the standards of which they are capable. Punctuality in the morning is unsatisfactory, on the part of a significant number of pupils.
20. Other shortcomings are:
- the standards in some classes in mathematics and in a significant number in science;
 - the dip in standards caused, this year, by some long-term staff absence and lack of continuity through temporary staffing arrangements; and
 - the irregular use of information and communications technology (ICT) in subjects across the curriculum.

The quality of education and training

21. There are several outstanding features of the school's provision. These are:
- the very good relationships between teachers and pupils;
 - the many and varied community partnerships to provide out-of-hours learning opportunities and access to a wide range of support services;
 - the consortium arrangements to extend choice in the sixth-form curriculum;
 - the amount and quality of pastoral care to encourage pupils to succeed; and
 - the quality of the personal and social education (PSE) programme at KS3 and KS4, in content and delivery.
22. There are also many good features in the quality of education which pupils receive.
23. Teaching overall is good. The following grades were awarded for the lessons observed:

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
6 subjects	8%	54%	33%	5%	0%
Other subjects	23%	66%	9%	2%	0%
Total	14%	58%	24%	4%	0%

24. Whilst there is a difference in the size and nature of the sample from that in the last inspection, it is clear that teaching has improved significantly. At that time, 48% of lessons were graded 1 or 2, compared to 72% now, and the proportion of lessons graded 1 has increased from 2% to 14%.
25. Other good features include:
- increasing choice of examination courses for pupils at KS4, especially in vocational education and, for those at risk of disaffection, an alternative curriculum;
 - good work-related education to prepare pupils for choices post-16;
 - extra-curricular clubs and visits;

- good use of data on pupils' attainment on entry and subsequent tracking of their progress at regular intervals;
- many initiatives to promote good attendance and behaviour, including strategies to deal with any bullying which occurs;
- effective promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development;
- the setting-up of a support centre to ease re-integration into mainstream classes after incidents of behaviour, long-term absence or exclusion;
- a well-managed and well-resourced library; and
- attractive accommodation of good quality.

26. Despite this overall good provision there are shortcomings in:

- the teaching in a small minority of classes;
- the limited amount of independent learning by pupils; and
- some inconsistency in the quality of marking.

Leadership and management

27. The outstanding features of leadership and management are the:

- extent to which aims and values are shared within the school and with local partners, so that there is a clear sense of purpose and commitment to pupils' success and welfare;
- extent to which the school has improved since the last inspection and the progress in each of the key issues except one;
- efficiency with which resources are used, both those of the school and those of the community and the good financial management;
- outward-looking and pro-active approach to gaining funding for new partnerships within the community;
- cost-effective provision for sixth-form education within the consortium; and
- increase in and training of support staff from the local community.

28. Other good features in the effective leadership by senior managers are:

- they have clear responsibilities, closely related to their expertise, and they work as a team in giving direction, in monitoring provision and in reinforcing expectations of behaviour and attitudes around the school;
- they are linked to middle managers and these links are mostly effective in improving performance;
- they have established both systems and a culture of self-evaluation and planning for improvement; and
- continuing professional development has been largely successful in up-dating teachers' skills and professionalism. The school has gained the award of 'Investor in People' for the quality of its staff development, for both teaching and support staff.

29. Governors give good strategic leadership and have a comprehensive understanding of the school's stage of development. They analyse performance data effectively and are very committed to the school's ethos and place in the community.

30. The quality of middle management has improved and the vast majority of middle managers now lead their teams effectively. This is because they:
- focus on standards, teaching and learning;
 - monitor teaching and the standards of pupils' work;
 - plan for improvement, based on evidence;
 - use data to measure pupils' progress; and
 - bid for and use resources effectively.
31. However, there are still some issues as yet unresolved by senior and middle managers. These are:
- some inconsistencies in standards, teaching, learning and assessment within and between departments;
 - insufficient co-ordination of the use of ICT and its resources across the curriculum; and
 - not enough progress on raising attendance levels, a key issue in the last report.
32. Nonetheless, governors, the headteacher, senior management team and staff are all committed to improvement and to providing the best opportunities for their pupils to succeed.

Recommendations

In order to improve further, the school should focus on the following targets:

R1. Ensure that the standards in all classes in science and mathematics reach those of the best.

R2. Continue to work with parents to raise attendance significantly.

R3. Improve the use of ICT across the curriculum.

R4. Increase pupils' involvement in and responsibility for their own learning.

The school's comprehensive school development plan has, as first priority, 'Learning Skills and Outcomes.' It targets raising achievement across departments, attendance and key skills.

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

Standards

Key Question 1: How well do learners achieve?

Grade 3: Good features outweigh shortcomings

33. This grade matches the school's self-evaluation grade.

KS3 and KS4

34. From the time of the last inspection in 2000, examination results at both key stages improved steadily until 2004. In 2005, results fell, particularly at GCSE. Contributory factors to this were that the year-group was less able than in previous years and an epidemic of illness led to a huge rise in absence in the Spring term.

35. In the NC tests, the good features are that:

- the proportion of pupils reaching at least level 5 in all three subjects combined has risen from 28% in 1999 to over 40% in the last three years, culminating in 45% in 2004;
- whilst below national averages, these results have placed the school among the top 25% of schools with a similar intake;
- results in English have also been in this category;
- results in science and mathematics have been above average, compared to similar schools; and
- results in mathematics continued to rise in 2005.

36. However, results in English and science fell in 2005, and consequently the percentage of pupils reaching level 5 in all three subjects.

37. At GCSE, the good features are that:

- the proportion of pupils gaining at least five grades A*-C rose from 27% in 1999 to 39% in 2004;
- whilst below national averages, results until 2004 have been consistently above average compared to schools with a similar intake. In some indicators they have placed the school in the top 25% of similar schools, consistently so in 2004;
- results in each of the core subjects, similarly, improved until 2004, placing each subject's results among those of the top 25% of schools;
- performance in some other subjects has been strong in terms of value added to pupils' prior attainment. This has been most consistent in art, geography, music, information technology, vocational courses and, recently, drama; and
- strongest of all has been performance in history, consistently well above the national average, with nearly half those entered gaining a grade A* or A.

38. However, shortcomings in performance at GCSE are that:

- in 2003 and 2005, a larger percentage of pupils left school without GCSE or Entry level qualifications than nationally. (8% in school compared to 4% nationally in 2005.)

- the percentage gaining at least five grades A*-G has not improved steadily since the last inspection and has fallen in several years; and
 - in 2005, 30% of pupils gained at least five grades A*-C, which did not meet the school's target, based on data.
39. The school has put plans in place to address shortcomings and raise performance in 2006.
40. Numerical targets for both key stages were met in 2004 in virtually every indicator, and boys did considerably better than girls, contrary to the national trend. In 2005, only in mathematics in KS3 was the target met. Girls have generally done better in most years, but by a smaller margin than nationally.
41. In the six subjects inspected, there are good features and no important shortcomings in
- history and information technology at both key stages;
 - mathematics at KS3; and
 - child development at KS4.
42. Good features outweigh shortcomings in:
- science at KS3 and KS4;
 - mathematics at KS4; and
 - business studies at KS4.
43. The grades awarded for standards achieved in the 61 lessons inspected in those subjects at KS3 and KS4 were as follows:

Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
5%	54%	35%	6%	0%

44. When combined with the grades awarded in the sixth form, these figures meet the Welsh Assembly Government targets for 2007, for the percentage of lessons graded 1 and 2. They narrowly miss the target for the percentage of lessons graded 1, 2 and 3. Overall, the figures are very close to those for all schools inspected in Wales in 2004-2005.
45. Thirty-five lessons were also observed, in all other subjects. The good features in standards achieved in all lessons observed are:
- pupils receive a wide range of support so that they succeed regardless of their social, ethnic or linguistic background;
 - much work has been done to improve key skills since the last inspection, with improved standards in KS3 in particular, and the renewal of the Basic Skills Award;
 - pupils speak with confidence and interest about their work to visitors;
 - they listen well to understand what tasks they have to do;
 - those with reading difficulties are given help and improve. Pupils in general can scan texts for information and know how to make good use of the library's resources;

- standards in writing have improved substantially since the last inspection when they were judged unsatisfactory. Written work is now neatly presented and has a good degree of technical accuracy in relation to ability. Pupils present their work in various formats with confidence, including some good extended writing especially by more able pupils;
 - numeracy is at least satisfactory, particularly at KS3 and used effectively in most subjects which apply numbers;
 - pupils' information technology skills are good, despite limited time at KS3 to learn skills; and
 - pupils collaborate well in pairs and groups when given opportunities. They enjoy solving problems.
46. However, the most significant factor which impacts adversely on these good features in pupils' achievement is their absence from school. Pupils' absence:
- affects all age and ability groups;
 - averages at 84% annually, well below the national target of 92%;
 - fell further in 2004-5 to 79%, because of an epidemic of illness;
 - results in pupils missing classwork, homework and assessments; and
 - adversely affects teaching, with the need for constant re-cap.
47. Other shortcomings in standards achieved are:
- inconsistency in standards between classes in mathematics and science;
 - the dip in performance in some subjects caused, this year unusually, by the number of long-term staff absences and lack of continuity in temporary staffing;
 - inconsistent standards in using ICT across the curriculum; and
 - little development of pupils' skills in bilingualism in subjects other than Welsh.
48. Pupils make most progress when:
- they do practical work and see the relevance of their studies in a practical context. Pupils do well in vocationally-based courses;
 - they engage in varied activities which aid concentration;
 - the most able are challenged by different, demanding questions; and
 - pupils with SEN in mainstream classes have work adapted to their needs.
49. In terms of the development of pupils' personal, social and learning skills, there are many good features:
- in most classes pupils listen, stay on task and complete the work set;
 - they showed respect for visitors and support for their teachers during the inspection by behaving particularly well. Standards of behaviour and attitudes to learning are good overall;
 - standards of dress are particularly good and prepare pupils well for the world of work;
 - pupils respond well to the trust placed in them to remain in the building before school and at break and lunchtime;
 - they show awareness of the needs of others, collect large sums of money for those less fortunate and respect diversity within the school and wider community; and
 - work-related education prepares them effectively for opportunities post-16.

50. Pupils are less successful in:

- arriving at school on time and attending regularly; and
- taking responsibility for their own learning and progress. Too many rely unduly on their teachers to help in the organisation of their work as well as their understanding. There is not enough individual research, and independent thinking.

Sixth form

51. Results in the sixth form have been consistent in recent years, below local and national averages, with an average points' score of 14. However, the percentage gaining at least two grades A-E improved to the national average of 94% in 2005. Results in vocational qualifications have also been good. There are plans to widen the range of vocational courses on offer, including those at level 2.

52. In the six subjects inspected, there are good features and no important shortcomings in science, information technology, history and the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education (CACHE) course, a professional qualification in child care. Good features outweigh shortcomings in mathematics and business studies.

53. The grades awarded to the 12 lessons observed in these subjects were as follows. In those subjects taught elsewhere, students were interviewed, their work examined and examination results analysed.

Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
8%	84%	8%	0%	0%

54. This is a small sample, which makes comparisons with national figures unreliable.

55. Students have good key skills generally, and in particular:

- they listen to their teachers and peers with respect;
- they debate ideas, analyse problems and are prepared to justify opinions when given opportunities;
- students undertake research confidently;
- written work is of a generally good standard in relation to ability;
- students apply numbers confidently in analysis of data or measurement;
- individual students give presentations of good quality using appropriate ICT software; and
- students work well together in solving problems and in improving their own and others' performance.

56. However, few choose to take qualifications in key skills and bilingual skills are not promoted across all subjects.

57. They do not make good progress when:

- their punctuality and attendance are erratic;

- they do not have sufficient opportunities for independent learning, in preparing for lessons, research and consolidation of knowledge. Some students are too passive in the learning process; and
- the most able are not challenged to use extended speech and writing in open-ended tasks, in some classes.

58. However, they make good progress in other aspects of the development of their personal, social and learning skills because:

- the consortium arrangements give many the opportunity to widen their perspective by attending another institution for all or part of the teaching in their chosen subjects;
- students show initiative in helping in activities with younger pupils and leading the school's efforts in charity fund-raising;
- they are well prepared for making choices about further education or employment; and
- they respond well to the religious studies' programme which raises a number of moral and social issues.

The quality of education and training

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

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

59. This grade matches the school's self-evaluation grade.

KS3 and KS4

60. In the 61 lessons in the six subjects inspected, the grades awarded for teaching at KS3 and KS4 were:

Grade1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
8%	51%	35%	6%	0%

61. Overall grades for the quality of teaching in the 96 lessons observed in KS3 and KS4 were:

Grade1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
13%	56%	26%	5%	0%

62. Teaching has good features with no important shortcomings in nearly 70% of all lessons. Teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection.

63. An outstanding feature of teaching is the very good relationship between teachers and pupils that promotes:

- high standards of behaviour from pupils in lessons;

- mutual respect for others; and
- a pleasant atmosphere for learning.

In most lessons teaching has the following good features:

- well-planned and well-structured lessons;
- knowledge and awareness of current issues in subjects;
- clear explanations at an appropriate level for pupils; and
- supportive interventions to assist pupils of all abilities.

64. Teaching also promotes equality of opportunity and all pupils are treated appropriately irrespective of their abilities and backgrounds. Classroom assistants work effectively with teachers to assist pupils with SEN.
65. In the large majority of lessons, where there are no important shortcomings, teaching:
- makes purposeful use of a range of resources including ICT to stimulate pupils' involvement;
 - uses questions skilfully that engage all pupils and probes their understanding;
 - provides activities that match pupils' needs and abilities; and
 - maintains pace to ensure that pupils make good progress in lessons.
66. There are some important shortcomings in teaching in a small minority of lessons. This is particularly apparent in science and in some lessons in mathematics.
67. Where there are important shortcomings, teaching does not:
- give enough opportunity for pupils to work independently;
 - ensure that pupils know what is expected of them;
 - provide sufficient challenge in the activities given to pupils; and
 - make effective use of resources to stimulate pupils.
68. Teaching provides some good opportunities to enhance pupils' skills in the Welsh language and their awareness of the culture of Wales. This, however, is not promoted extensively across subjects of the curriculum.
69. All statutory requirements for assessment and reporting on NC subjects are met and teaching also fulfils the regulations of examining boards.
70. The school makes effective use of assessment information to track pupils' progress. Subjects assess NC levels at intervals throughout the school year and this is collated centrally for each year group. Good use is also made of benchmark data to analyse progress. Overall the procedures work well.
71. Normally teachers assess pupils' work accurately and fairly. There is good practice in many subjects where:
- marking is carried out regularly and systematically;
 - teachers mark consistently and accurately;
 - homework is used effectively to consolidate and extend learning;

- teachers provide clear written comments to identify strengths and weaknesses; and
- pupils are aware of what they need to do to improve.

72. Occasionally the assessment of pupils' work falls short of the above and:

- marking lacks rigour and consistency;
- comments on pupils' work lack detail; and
- targets for improvement are unclear.

73. Annual reports to parents and guardians provide good information on their child's academic and personal development. Targets for improvement in subjects, however, are often too general and do not indicate clearly what a pupil needs to do to improve.

Sixth form

74. In the six subjects inspected the grades awarded for teaching in the sixth form were:

Grade1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
8%	67%	25%	0%	0%

75. Overall grades for the quality of teaching in all lessons observed in the sixth form were:

Grade1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
20%	65%	15%	0%	0%

76. In the sixth form, teaching is significantly better than in KS3 and KS4.

77. As in KS3 and KS4, teachers establish very good working relationships with students that foster their learning. Teachers have a good up-to-date knowledge of their subjects and use this purposefully to engage students in lessons.

78. Teaching has many good features that nearly always include:

- setting clear objectives for students that are appropriate to their needs;
- using questions skilfully to encourage students' active participation;
- using a variety of methods and resources in lessons;
- giving opportunities for students to learn independently; and
- providing helpful information to students on coursework requirements and studyskills;.

79. However, some of the shortcomings in teaching in KS3 and KS4 are also evident in the sixth form. Occasionally, teachers spend too much time explaining work to the whole class and students are not provided with sufficient opportunity to work independently.

80. Assessment of students' work is good and sometimes very good. Teachers usually:
- maintain a comprehensive record of students' achievements;
 - mark students' work thoroughly and accurately;
 - include annotations on students' work to draw their attention to important aspects;
 - provide clear and detailed oral and written feedback to students that identifies areas for improvement; and
 - allow students the opportunity to self-evaluate their own progress.
81. In a few instances marking is not rigorous enough and students are not aware of what they need to do to improve.
82. Reports to parents and guardians are of a very good quality. Comments from subject teachers are detailed and usually provide clear targets for improvement. Students also write a self-evaluative comment that provides useful information to teachers on their progress.

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

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

83. This grade matches the school's self-evaluation grade.
84. The outstanding feature of the school's provision is the extensive range of subjects available for post-16 students through the Cynon Valley 16+ Consortium, described in detail in key question 7.
85. There are many good features of the school's provision. These include:
- the wide range of extra-curricular activities in school. (The provision in outlying centres in the catchment area, which serves pupils and adult members of the community is an outstanding feature described in detail in key question 4);
 - the effective arrangements for transition from primary school including curricular links to improve literacy in particular;
 - a curriculum at KS3 that, in addition to NC requirements, includes drama which has improved pupils' self-confidence;
 - a curriculum at KS4 that gives pupils a wide choice of subjects including a range of vocational options which can be followed up at post-16 level and that gives pupils accreditation at a variety of levels;
 - a well-structured alternative curriculum in year (Y)11 (Keystart), which, together with a re-integration programme, caters well for pupils at risk of disaffection;
 - the success of a variety of strategies at KS3 and KS4 to address key skills, literacy in particular and to a lesser extent numeracy and ICT;
 - timetabled lessons for sixth-form students in numeracy and literacy, and a programme of enrichment activities which provide opportunities for accreditation in key skills;

- the way in which the ethos of the school promotes good social and moral development of its learners and awareness of global citizenship. They show respect for each other and support generously a wide range of charitable causes;
- the way in which subjects and assemblies contribute to pupils' spiritual and cultural development; and
- learning experiences which meet legal and course requirements and which include religious education in the sixth form, a key issue in the last inspection report.

86. There are some shortcomings. These are that:

- whilst there are enrichment activities for sixth-form students there is no overall timetabled programme of PSE in Y12 and 13; and
- there is no audit of the use of ICT in subjects across the curriculum.

87. There are also many good features in the way the school responds to the needs of employers and the wider community. These include:

- the school's success in gaining funding to establish community initiatives which foster the well-being of its pupils and their families;
- the well-focused careers advice given to pupils at transition stages through partnership with Careers Wales, the effective programme of work experience in Y10 and pupils' access to Careers Wales on Line;
- the well-structured programme of PSE and work-related education, including entrepreneurial activities, arranged by the Mid Glamorgan Education and Business Partnership;
- the setting up of a small business in the sixth form selling DVDs of teachers' favourite recipes;
- the school's response to pupils' interests and the needs of employers by introducing vocational courses such as CACHE and the Diploma in Digital Application (DiDA);
- promotion of sustainable development through recycling, energy conservation and healthy-eating options and the establishment of a pupils' environmental group which has registered the school as an Eco-school;
- experiences which promote the *Cwricwlwm Cymreig* through subject provision, participation in the Eisteddfod and visits to Llangrannog; and
- the way the school responds to the needs of its learners through the curriculum and through its commitment to local partnerships throughout its catchment area. These all play an important part in the regeneration of the community.

88. There are some shortcomings. These are that:

- there is a lack of bilingual signage around the school and little use of incidental Welsh during the school day; and
- there is no audit of the *Cwricwlwm Cymreig*.

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

Grade 1: Good with outstanding features
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89. This grade matches the school's self-evaluation grade.

90. The outstanding features of the school's provision are:

- the strength and variety of partnerships;
- the extensive use of outside agencies to provide support for pupils;
- the quality of the PSE programme in KS3 and KS4 in content and delivery; and
- the long-term care focus.

Outstanding practice

<p>91. The Mountain Ash Partnership (MAP) was begun in 1999 to work with the young people of the lower Cynon valley to help them thrive in school. The project offers an inter-linked programme using the resources of the school, its partner primaries and the wider community.</p>

<p>92. Funding has been obtained to employ youth workers in five local bases to provide a range of pre-school and out-of-school activities for the benefit of the community. The activities include dance and cookery. There are also youth forums, advisory groups and a drop-in café.</p>

<p>93. Pupils develop personal and social skills and gain confidence. The school recognises that pupils become more committed learners through the activities and establishes a strong foundation for lifelong learning.</p>
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94. The many good features of the school's provision include:

- the comprehensive induction and transition process for Y7 pupils to help them settle into school and make progress in their learning;
- the knowledge that form tutors, support staff, heads of year and senior managers have of the pupils;
- the extent to which the PSE programme and work-related education follow national guidelines;
- the careers advice of high quality and the appropriate work experience for pupils of all abilities;
- the whole staff's training in and clear understanding of statutory child protection procedures;
- the comprehensive approach to identifying, assessing and providing for pupils with SEN, based on the Code of Practice;
- the support available to meet a wide range of special educational needs;
- the training of all staff and the strategies used to address any behavioural difficulties;

- the support, guidance and practices which promote inclusion and equal opportunities throughout the school;
- the promotion of good race relations across the curriculum and through its out-of-hours activities;
- the strategies to address incidents of bullying when they occur; and
- the celebration of cultural diversity through the curriculum and also within the school population.

95. This very positive picture of the school's provision does have some shortcomings. These are that:

- the strategies for improving attendance across the school, despite considerable effort and a recent improvement, have not resulted in a significant increase;
- procedures for ensuring pupils' punctuality and for controlling truancy from lessons during the day are not fully effective;
- buildings do not allow full wheelchair access;
- vocationally-based courses for pupils with SEN at KS4 have increased but are not yet fully comprehensive; and
- there are no timetabled lessons in PSE in the sixth form.

Leadership and management

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

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

96. This grade matches the school's self-evaluation grade.

97. The outstanding feature is the direction given by the headteacher, ably supported by the senior management team, in ensuring that the school's aims and values are shared among all within the school and wider community.

98. These aims are to offer pupils opportunities for success and to provide the support for them to be successful. Both of these aims are fulfilled. Senior managers have shown vision in reaching out to the local community, for example in the sixth-form consortium and the MAP project.

99. The headteacher and other members of senior management are experienced and effective, particularly because:

- they have clearly defined responsibilities, related to their expertise, with a good balance between them in terms of areas of responsibility;
- they work well as a team in introducing new initiatives and supporting each other;
- they are a regular presence around the school in reinforcing expectations of behaviour and attitudes;

- they are linked to middle managers and these links are mostly effective in improving performance;
- they have introduced a range of systems for monitoring provision, including self-evaluation, departmental reviews, use of external advisers and monitoring of teaching and pupils' work;
- these systems have led to a reflective culture across the school as a whole; and
- good use has been made of continuing professional development to up-date teachers' skills and professionalism. The school has gained the award of 'Investor in People' for this work, among teaching and support staff.

100. The quality of middle management has improved since the last inspection and the vast majority of middle managers now lead their teams effectively. This is because they:

- focus on standards, teaching and learning;
- monitor teaching and the standards of pupils' work;
- plan for improvement, resulting from these findings;
- use data to measure pupils' progress; and
- bid for and use resources effectively.

101. The school is committed to continuing improvement and sets itself clear targets in its development plan. Success has been achieved in:

- evaluating progress regularly and setting new priorities appropriately;
- making all-round improvement since the last inspection; and
- reaching numerical targets for public examinations up to 2004, though not in 2005.

102. The school has included the priorities of the Welsh Assembly Government in its own development plan. Particularly good progress has been made in:

- social inclusion, whereby all pupils have equal opportunities within a supportive environment;
- community regeneration through the MAP project ;
- racial awareness;
- sustainable development, especially healthy eating; and
- PSE and work-related education.

103. However, there are still some issues as yet not fully resolved by senior and middle managers. These include:

- some inconsistencies in standards, teaching, learning and assessment within and between departments;
- inconsistency within the two core subjects of science and mathematics, in standards and teaching;
- insufficient co-ordination of ICT across the curriculum and its resources;
- not enough progress on raising attendance levels, a key issue in the last report; and
- little promotion of bilingualism across the curriculum.

104. Governors make a good contribution to the strategic management of the school and the monitoring of performance. This is because they:

- have a comprehensive understanding of the school's aims, stage of development and place in the local community;
- have an effective committee structure for decision-making;
- bring expertise from other roles in the local community;
- listen to presentations by members of staff at meetings;
- meet the school council regularly to hear pupils' and students' views;
- analyse performance data regularly; and
- ask pertinent questions of senior managers about performance and plans for improvement.

105. The school meets regulatory and legal requirements.

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

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings.

106. This grade matches the school's self-evaluation grade.

107. The outstanding feature is the progress which the school has made since the last inspection, particularly in standards, teaching, the MAP project and the consortium. In all the key issues except attendance, the school has made substantial progress, particularly in pupils' writing which has improved from unsatisfactory to good, in provision for pupils with SEN and in raising pupils' self-esteem.

108. There are many good features of how leaders and managers evaluate and improve quality and standards. These include:

- clear responsibilities for the senior management team (SMT), which are closely related to their expertise. They work well as a team in promoting a consistent message, in giving direction, in monitoring provision and in reinforcing expectations of staff and pupils;
- comprehensive self-evaluation arrangements which are demonstrated through: fortnightly meetings between the SMT link member and the head of department; fortnightly meetings between senior managers and heads of year; weekly meetings of middle managers with their teams, using a pre-published set of agendas; departmental reviews by SMT on a two-year cycle; and the involvement of the County Advisory Service on an annual review (this year on numeracy);
- the clear, concise and honest self-evaluation report prepared for the inspection, which matched inspectors' judgements to a large degree;
- strategic planning which is based on evidence, sets three-year targets and involves all staff. The school development plan (SDP) and nearly all departmental development plans (DDPs) are of high quality, successfully focusing upon priorities and standards. There are many good examples, but quality is particularly high in English, history and geography;

- the growing use of pupils' self-evaluation to inform and adjust teaching strategies. There are particularly good examples in history, geography and religious studies;
- the willingness of the school to use information from parental questionnaires, community links and partner primary schools to improve standards;
- the support by the headteacher and the chairperson of governors to hear and act upon learners' requests through the school council;
- effective leadership by most middle managers, who focus on teaching and learning, assessment, standards of pupils' work and who use these to inform planning for further improvement;
- the widespread use by staff of baseline and predictive data for raising pupils' achievement. In geography, for example, one teacher makes sure that pupils are kept aware of expectations by using a card attached to each pupil's exercise book, which highlights both achievement and an expected grade. Most, but not all staff, have this information in their mark books;
- the adequate resourcing of departments through a bidding system based upon need and directly linked to the DDP and the school's ability to attract additional funding; and
- the openness, honesty and reflective culture of the school and the growing staff confidence in sharing best practice and seeking strategies for further improvement.

109. However, despite this positive picture there are some shortcomings. These are that:

- form tutors and subject staff do not pay sufficient attention to monitoring and challenging pupils' absence, on a lesson-by-lesson basis;
- there are still some inconsistencies in standards, teaching, learning and assessment within and between departments;
- in science, self-evaluation procedures are weak, and further action needs to be taken by senior and middle managers to establish consistent standards in teaching, learning and assessment;
- in mathematics, development planning is not sufficiently detailed nor adequately linked to identified shortcomings;
- there is no development plan for the library; and
- there is insufficient co-ordination of ICT, and the *Cwricwlwm Cymreig*.

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

Grade 1: Good with outstanding features
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110. The school graded this key question as grade 2, underscoring the several outstanding features.

111. The outstanding features of the school's provision are:

- the very effective and economical use made of both teaching and support staff, who work to good purpose in promoting opportunity for pupils and in raising standards;

- the well-managed and focused in-service training provision for both teaching and support staff, which is monitored and tracked by a member of the SMT. Additional funding is accessed through the General Teaching Council for Wales (GTCW). The school has achieved 'Investors in People' status;
- the work of the finance officer, headteacher and governors, who skilfully manage the budget, which reflects the priorities of the SDP. Contingency planning ensures that budgets take account of longer-term trends; and
- the post-16 consortium, which provides very good and far-reaching opportunities for students at very economical cost.

Outstanding practice

112. Mountain Ash Comprehensive School works in partnership with three other Cynon Valley schools to ensure that full and rich curricular provision is on offer to students. In this academic year, twenty-two A-level courses in both years 12 and 13 and nine vocational courses are run for students. Planning is at an advanced stage with the local Further Education College, to offer additional level 2 vocational courses, in September 2006, and thus provide opportunity and progression for another section of the school community.

113. The Consortium effectively operates its own transport between the sites.

114. Students from the various institutions are supportive of each other and work productively together. They are strong in their view that they wish to see post-16 provision retained in the valley.

115. Each institution offers its teaching strengths and students speak highly of the teaching, whether or not it is delivered on their site. Some courses have shared teaching and in these cases teachers liaise effectively.

116. The partnership works on mutual trust. This has been built up by the headteachers' strategic group, by the sound work of the deputies' management group and by staff. Average group size is twelve in Y12 and fourteen point five in Y13. This represents good value for money.

117. There are also many other good features of the school's provision. These include:

- pupils' and students' access to a good range of appropriate resources to support their learning;
- the well-resourced and well-managed library, which provides a very pleasant environment for sixth-form students for independent learning;
- Pupils' good induction course to the use of the library, and access at break and in the lunch-hour, as well as on three occasions after school each week;
- accommodation which is in a good state of repair. It promotes a learning environment which meets the requirements of the curriculum;
- the effective use, in many areas, of the classroom surfaces for the display of pupils' work;

- the lack of litter and graffiti, through positive site management by the caretaking staff, to provide a pleasant learning environment;
- the check of toilet areas, three times daily, to guard against vandalism;
- the provision of resources to departments from requests made, which directly link to DDPs;
- the auditors' report (every four years), which states that school systems are satisfactory and that recommendations made by them on a previous audit have been implemented; and
- the progress on implementing the workforce remodelling agenda and the effective use of planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time.

118. However, despite this very positive picture of the school's efficient use of resources there are some shortcomings. These are that:

- the library is not yet used sufficiently by departments, particularly for independent research. Nor do many departments suggest books that they wish the librarian to purchase;
- there is insufficient, regular use of ICT facilities by some departments, (although an additional ICT room is currently being developed to meet the needs of subjects such as English, history and geography);
- there has been long-term absence of a small, but significant number of staff in certain areas and thus lack of continuity in teaching;
- some boys do not show an appropriate level of respect for the toilet facilities provided, despite the school's best efforts; and
- the buildings do not currently allow full wheelchair access.

Standards achieved in subjects and areas of learning

Mathematics

KS3 – Grade 2 – Good features and no important shortcomings

KS4 – Grade 3 – Good features outweigh shortcomings

KS3

Good features

119. Pupils make good progress through the key stage and generally gain a secure understanding of the work they do.
120. The best achievement and progress are made in classes where pupils are given opportunities to discuss and justify their methods or decisions, and when they can see a clear reason or application for the mathematics they are doing. In one class in Y9, pupils showed high levels of reasoning in their work on probability.
121. Pupils' mental number skills are generally good across the key stage but better in Y7 and Y8 than Y9.
122. Pupils with SEN use mathematical language well and they cope confidently with simple problems on addition and subtraction of money.
123. In Y7, pupils show good understanding of basic probability and can explain well why one situation may be fair and another unfair or biased. They generally use number confidently in decimal and percentage form and recall well the names and properties of various two-dimensional shapes.
124. Pupils in Y8 recall well the properties of various triangles and use calculators appropriately and effectively. In Y9, pupils manipulate successfully simple algebraic equations and know how to check for the correctness of their solution.

Shortcomings

125. Poor attendance hinders the progress of a significant minority of pupils.
126. In a few classes across the key stage and the ability range, the standards and progress of a few pupils are limited because work is not matched well enough to their ability and prior achievement.
127. A few pupils lack confidence in using fractions, and their recall of multiplication and division facts is slow.

KS4

Good features

128. Most pupils, particularly in upper sets and within SEN classes, generally build well on the work they have done in KS3 and make appropriate progress.
129. Pupils in Y10 know how to calculate ratios of quantities, plot simple algebraic functions, and comment with understanding on the amount and type of correlation between two variables.
130. In Y11, pupils show a secure knowledge and understanding of the properties of various two and three-dimensional objects and, where appropriate, find their areas, surface areas and volumes.
131. In one class in Y11, pupils show impressive mathematical, oral and writing skills when reasoning and justifying their work with powers and indices.

Shortcomings

132. For a significant minority of pupils, sporadic or long-term absence hinders their continuity of work, overall progress, and attainment in external examinations.
133. A significant minority of pupils, mostly in middle and lower ability classes, has difficulty recalling basic mathematical facts and their achievement and progress are limited because of this.
134. In a few classes across the key stage and the ability range, the standards and progress of a few pupils are limited because work is not matched well enough to their interests, ability and prior achievement.
135. Pupils rarely enhance their mathematical skills, knowledge and understanding by using ICT.

Sixth form - Grade 3 – Good features outweigh shortcomings

136. Students in the sixth form carry out their studies in Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and A level mathematics in nearby schools as part of consortium arrangements.

Good features

137. Students in Y12 and Y13 gain a good knowledge and understanding of a range of basic concepts in pure mathematics, mechanics and statistics at AS level.
138. Students readily solve problems involving inequalities, sequences and series and can use calculus to solve appropriate problems.
139. In mechanics, students solve successfully problems involving, for example, forces and changes in energy due to the collision of objects.
140. Students make good progress in basic probability and statistical calculations.

Shortcomings

141. Students show weaknesses in algebraic manipulation that often hinder their progress in solving various problems, mostly in pure mathematics, and restrict their overall success and attainment.
142. Students are insecure in sketching graphs of basic functions, and in knowing how their shape or position in space will alter when one or more of the terms in a function is changed.

Science

KS3 - Grade 3 - Good features outweigh shortcomings

KS4 - Grade 3 - Good features outweigh shortcomings

KS3 and KS4

Good features

143. A majority of pupils has a good understanding of a range of scientific topics. They make progress during lessons and learn new skills and scientific ideas.
144. They are able to use their knowledge to understand unfamiliar events and make scientific predictions.
145. Some pupils use their knowledge to help them understand the contribution that science makes to daily life.
146. The majority of pupils writes good explanations of work in science. A small minority also uses graphs to present ideas. A minority can give extended verbal responses to questions about science.
147. Pupils' knowledge of scientific terms is generally good and they can use them accurately, both orally and in writing.
148. Pupils have good practical skills. They carry out experimental work carefully and safely. They make a range of observations and record their results accurately.
149. At KS4, the more able pupils understand the concept of a fair test and the need to control variables.

Shortcomings

150. A significant minority of pupils has difficulty recalling recent work and this means that they make less progress in learning new ideas.
151. Some pupils make little or no progress when lessons are very teacher-centred and lack stimulus, pace and challenge. Pupils do not know how well they are doing nor what they need to do to improve.

152. A number of pupils are sometimes careless and inaccurate in their practical work. Some have difficulty explaining the implications of their experimental results.
153. At KS4, pupils of average and lower ability do not analyse the results of their experimental work in sufficient depth. They do not evaluate the success of their experimental methods.
154. The progress of a significant number of pupils, particularly in KS4, is hindered by irregular attendance.

Sixth form - Grade 2 –Good features and no important shortcomings

Good features

155. Students have a good, broad understanding of their work. They can use their knowledge to make scientific explanations of unfamiliar situations.
156. Students understand the impact of science on human society. They are aware of opposing views on issues such as genetic engineering and pollution.
157. Students write fluently about science with a mature style. They are able to debate scientific ideas and produce a balanced argument.
158. The majority of students regularly plans scientific investigations well. They know the importance of controlling variables and use various techniques to ensure that their experimental work is of a high standard.

Shortcoming

159. A small minority of students lacks an in-depth understanding of work covered. This reduces their ability to debate and explain scientific ideas.

Information technology

KS3 - Grade 2 - Good features and no important shortcomings

KS4 - Grade 2 - Good features and no important shortcomings

KS3

Good features

160. Pupils of all abilities use ICT equipment and software competently and confidently to achieve specific outcomes which are appropriate to their age and development.
161. Most pupils explore the possibilities offered by software and will try different

features in response to their problem.

162. Pupils use ICT well to process, present, share and exchange information, and to explore and solve problems in a variety of contexts, for a variety of audiences, in accordance with the NC for information technology.

163. Pupils understand the benefits of using ICT in the tasks they undertake and a large majority can explain how ICT can be used to enhance their own work and studies.

164. The standard of accuracy is generally high and pupils understand that this is essential when applying ICT. Pupils combine accuracy with creativity to produce interesting and attractive products appropriate to the purpose intended.

165. Most pupils are able to make good use of spreadsheet models and many can design, adapt and extend them, refining them appropriately.

Shortcomings

166. There are no important shortcomings.

KS4

Good features

167. Attainment in examinations is good.

168. Less able pupils and those with SEN taking the Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT) course continue to make good progress developing their skills acquired in KS3 and applying them to increasingly challenging contexts and problems.

169. Pupils taking GCSE ICT and DiDA produce accurate and attractive work of a good standard and they demonstrate an understanding of the course specifications.

170. A large majority of pupils is able to produce coherent solutions to problems from the real world which typically meet the ICT demands in terms of style and being fit for purpose.

171. Most pupils are able to collect, process and organise data appropriately and can present information selectively, for instance from a model, in order to perform useful functions.

Shortcomings

172. There are no important shortcomings.

Sixth form – Grade 2 – Good features and no important shortcomings

Good features

173. Students are able to analyse a brief and develop a plan, systematically, to deliver the processes necessary to solve the problem.
174. Students demonstrate an understanding that an ICT system has to match the needs and abilities of the projected users. Their work demonstrates that the practice and limitations of users are taken into good account when they are designing systems.
175. Students are able to build and use complex databases to enable useful reports to be generated.
176. Most students are careful to annotate their projects well. They test their systems systematically to ensure that they meet the brief and produce reports of good quality.
177. Students understand the place of ICT in the world. They exploit the breadth of ICT available and can produce presentations and pages for the internet that are well-designed and fit for their purpose.

Shortcomings

178. There are no important shortcomings.

History

KS3 - Grade 2 - Good features and no important shortcomings

KS4 - Grade 2 - Good features and no important shortcomings

KS3

Good features

179. Pupils have a sound historical knowledge of the topics covered and a good understanding of people and events.
180. They have good chronological awareness. Pupils with SEN are able to sequence events accurately on a timeline and identify simple anachronisms.
181. Pupils use subject-specific vocabulary accurately and in the correct context, and understand key words and key concepts.
182. They have good recall and oral skills, and are confident in selecting evidence from a range of primary and secondary sources.
183. In Y8, pupils understand that historians have interpreted the reign of Henry VII in a variety of ways. More able pupils give reasoned explanations for these differing viewpoints.

184. In their work on Henry VIII's break with Rome, pupils demonstrate an understanding that events have multiple causes. They accurately categorise causes as political, economic, religious and social and recognise that some causes are more important than others.
185. In their study of working conditions in nineteenth century coalmines, Y9 pupils assess the usefulness to historians of a pictorial and a written source of evidence. More able pupils identify gaps in the evidence, make inferences and examine the author's motives for producing the source of information.
186. All pupils record information in a variety of forms including essays, short paragraphs, tables and mind maps.
187. More able pupils produce good and sometimes very good quality written work. Pieces of extended writing are neatly presented, well planned and logically argued.

Shortcomings

188. There are no important shortcomings. However, the work of some pupils is incomplete as a result of absence from school.

KS4

Good features

189. In KS4, pupils successfully build upon the wide range of skills acquired in KS3. Their written work shows a growing maturity in the depth of their responses and their insights into the motivation and attitudes of people in the past.
190. Pupils analyse statistical information on exports and levels of production, and use their own background knowledge, to reach balanced judgements on the condition of the United States economy in 1917.
191. In their work on Hitler's rise to power, they understand that events may have multiple causes, can explain how these are interrelated and can assess their relative importance.
192. Pupils demonstrate considerable ability in testing sources of evidence for bias, reliability and usefulness. They show an increasing ability to identify gaps and omissions in evidence.
193. In their coursework on the conduct of the First World War, many pupils produce work of a very high standard. More able students begin to show an understanding of synthesis and argue that competing interpretations can be valid for different reasons.

Shortcomings

194. There are no important shortcomings.

Sixth form - Grade 2 – Good features and no important shortcomings

Good features

195. Students produce well-written essays showing a developing ability to research and structure an argument in order to arrive at a balanced conclusion.
196. In their study of Chamberlain's policy of Appeasement, students demonstrate a clear understanding that historical interpretations change over time and can give reasons why such changes occur.
197. They are confident in using their own background knowledge to challenge the views put forward by professional historians.
198. Students are able to evaluate the reliability and utility of a wide range of primary and secondary sources. They demonstrate skill in cross-referencing sources, point out omissions and use their background knowledge to make inferences.
199. In class discussions, the majority of students expresses views with confidence. When challenged, they can give valid explanations and substantiate their judgements with reference to relevant examples.

Shortcomings

200. A minority of students makes a limited contribution to class discussion, and does not draw upon knowledge of a period when assessing the usefulness of a source of information.

Business studies

KS4- Grade 3 - Good features outweigh shortcomings

Good features

201. In GCSE business studies, pupils' results are above local and national averages. The majority gains an additional qualification in office technology GCSE.
202. The majority of pupils demonstrates a satisfactory understanding of business studies concepts.
203. The majority of pupils is able to use business terms such as fixed costs and variable costs competently.
204. The majority of pupils is able to use graphical data to present break-even point.
205. The majority of pupils demonstrates an understanding of the Data Protection Act and its impact on business.

Shortcomings

- 206. More able pupils do not achieve GCSE grades appropriate to their ability.
- 207. Pupils do not extend their answers to demonstrate in-depth knowledge.
- 208. The majority of pupils does not demonstrate a detailed understanding of the implications of break-even analysis for a business.
- 209. A significant minority of pupils is not able to complete analysis independently and understand the impact on business of an increase in price.

Sixth form – Grade 3 - Good features outweigh shortcomings

Good features

- 210. Students are able to use business terminology confidently to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the recruitment process of an organisation.
- 211. Students demonstrate a clear understanding of application forms and how businesses use them to select appropriate personnel.
- 212. Students use ICT confidently to present reports.
- 213. Students analyse business problems well in group-work and present their findings confidently.

Shortcomings

- 214. More able students do not demonstrate higher levels of understanding of the recruitment process.
- 215. Students make less progress than they could because their verbal responses are brief and lack depth of knowledge.
- 216. Students are passive in their learning and do not show sufficient initiative.

Child Development

KS4 - Grade 2 - Good features and no important shortcomings

Good features

- 217. Pupils have good recall of previous work and display a sound knowledge of issues relating to the care and development of babies and young children.

218. Pupils work co-operatively in groups to research and analyse baby products. Here they extract relevant information from resource material and make good progress in understanding family circumstances and environmental issues.
219. Investigative skills are good. Most pupils are able to research toys, books and play activities independently. They usually make appropriate decisions on the use and benefits to children's progress.
220. Pupils plan and carry out a number of purposeful visits to individual children. They record detailed observations in their child study folders and many produce well-analysed judgements on developmental stages.
221. Presentation of leaflets and coursework is good and enhanced by effective use of ICT.

Shortcomings

222. A small number of pupils lacks confidence and hesitates in putting forward a point of view in class discussion.
223. A minority of written work is descriptive rather than analytical.

Certificate in Children's Care and Education (CACHE)

Sixth form - Grade 2 - Good features and no important shortcomings

Good features

224. Students demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of community child care provision. They are able to identify and explain measures required for safety and child protection.
225. Regular placements enhance understanding. Here students can relate the work they do in class to realistic child-care settings. Their placement logs show positive attitudes, commitment and good progress.
226. Students participate well in class activities. They confidently discuss and analyse behaviour measures, practical care routines and the dietary needs of babies and young children.
227. Research tasks are well undertaken and students collate and record relevant data on the various stages of children's development using both primary and secondary sources. Coursework assignments are completed successfully and a number of students redraft their work to improve the overall quality.
228. ICT skills are good and used effectively to search for current information and to enhance the visual presentation of their work.

Shortcomings

229. A minority of students does not write in sufficient depth and detail to develop fully the issues they are investigating.

School's response to the inspection

We are pleased that the report closely matches the school's own judgements on its performance and that it truly reflects the confidence, enthusiasm and good behaviour of most pupils.

The report confirms the school's progress in realising its aim of ensuring that motivation, achievement, challenge and support are guaranteed for all students. It is particularly pleasing to see "the extent to which these values are shared within the school and with local partners..." is considered an outstanding feature of the school.

The significant improvement in teaching and standards of achievement since the last inspection reflects the school's continued focus on teaching and learning. This is complemented by the outstanding levels of support for pupils identified in the report, together with a continually developing curriculum which aims to provide relevant courses across all key stages.

The quality of planning and innovation is identified both in the expansion of opportunities for sixth-form students within the Cynon Valley Consortium, as well as in the school's extensive partnership programme which provides support and opportunities for pupils in their own communities.

The immediate challenge for the school is to re-establish the pattern of improving examination results which has been in place over a number of years. The strategy will include a focus on developing teaching styles which promote independent learning. The most important aspect of the challenge remains the issue of condoned absence and irregular attendance by a significant number of pupils throughout the school. Indeed this is the one key issue which has not been successfully addressed since the last inspection. The school will review its current strategies for improving attendance and work closely with all partners to ensure that the issue is addressed at all levels both within the school and the wider community.

The school's action plan will include specific measures designed to tackle variations in standards which were found in some classes, as well as plans to improve the co-ordination of cross-curricular IT.

The school wishes to acknowledge the professional, objective approach of the inspection team and their success in getting to know the school during their visit.

Appendix A

Basic information about the school

Name of school	Mountain Ash Comprehensive School
School type	Community
Age-range of pupils	11-18
Address of school	New Road Mountain Ash
Post-code	CF45 4DG
Telephone number	01443-479199

Headteacher	Mr M. Guilfoyle
Date of appointment	September 1993
Chair of governors/ Appropriate authority	Cllr. P. Jarman
Reporting inspector	Miss G. Owen
Dates of inspection	6 – 10 February 2006

Appendix B

School data and indicators

Year group	Y 7	Y 8	Y 9	Y 10	Y 11	Y 12	Y13	Y 14	Total
Number of pupils	190	174	226	212	209	86	43		1140

Total number of teachers			
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time equivalent (fte)
Number of teachers	66	1	66.16

Staffing information	
Pupil: teacher (fte) ratio (excluding special classes)	17.2:1
Average teaching group size	21
Overall contact ratio (percentage)	77%

Percentage attendance for three complete terms prior to the inspection								
	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13	Whole School
Term 1	85	84	80	81	75	75	73	81
Term 2	84	83	77	79	73	67	58	78
Term 3	84	82	78	78	75	68	72	78

Percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals	32
Number of pupils excluded during 12 months prior to inspection	42 temp.

Appendix C

National Curriculum Assessment Results End of Key Stage 3:

National Curriculum Assessment KS3 results: 2005															
Total number of pupils in Y9: 211															
Percentage of pupils at each level															
			D	A	F	W	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	EP
English	Teacher assessment	School	0	0	0	0	0	6	15	17	37	22	3	0	
		National	0	1	1	0	0	2	8	21	34	24	9	0	
	Test	School	0	8	1	5	-	-	6	25	36	16	3	-	
		National	0	4	1	0	-	-	8	20	33	23	10	-	
Mathematics	Teacher assessment	School	0	1	1	0	0	2	8	24	29	26	9	-	
		National	0	1	1	0	0	1	7	19	26	32	14	0	
	Test	School	0	9	1	0	-	-	6	21	26	28	10	-	
		National	0	5	1	-	-	-	5	17	20	36	15	-	
Science	Teacher assessment	School	0	1	1	0	0	0	11	27	28	25	7	-	
		National	0	1	1	0	0	0	6	20	33	27	12	0	
	Test	School	0	8	1	0	-	-	9	27	26	24	5	-	
		National	0	4	0	-	-	-	5	17	33	28	13	-	

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

Percentage of pupils attaining at least level 5 in mathematics, science and either English or Welsh (first language)			
By Teacher Assessment		by Test	
In the school	45.2	In the school	41.4
In Wales	56	In Wales	57

* National results are 2004.

Public Examination Results:

For pupils aged 15, results in GCSE, Entry Level Qualification, GNVQ and NVQ	
Number of pupils aged 15 on the school roll in January 2005	209
Average GCSE or GNVQ points score per pupil	26

The percentage of 15 year old pupils who in 2005:	School	UA	Wales
entered for 5 or more GCSEs or equivalent	75	84	87
Attained at least 5 GCSE grades A* to C, the equivalent vocational qualifications or a combination of both	30	44	52
Attained at least 5 GCSE grades A* to G, the equivalent vocational qualifications or a combination of both	71	81	85
Attained GCSE grades A*-C in each of mathematics, science, English or Welsh first language (the core subject indicator)	19	30	38
entered at least one Entry level qualification, GCSE short course or GCSE	95	97	97
Attained one or more GCSE grades A*-C or the vocational qualification equivalent	58	70	76
Attained one or more GCSE grades A*-G or the vocational qualification equivalent	89	91	93
Attained no graded GCSE or the vocational qualification equivalent	11	9	7
Attained one or more Entry level qualification only	3	3	3
Attained a GNVQ Part 1, a GNVQ at Foundation level or NVQ level 1	0		
Attained a GNVQ Part 1, a GNVQ at Intermediate level or NVQ level 2	5		

For pupils aged 16, 17 and 18, results in A/AS, GNVQs and NVQs	
Number of pupils aged 16, 17 and 18 in January 2005	98
Number of pupils entered for 2 or more GCE A level examinations or equivalent in 2005	32
Number of pupils entered for fewer than 2 GCE A levels or equivalent in 2005	14

	School	UA	Wales
Percentage of pupils entered who achieved 2 or more grades A-C	41	57	68
Percentage of pupils entered who achieved 2 or more grades A-E	94	92	94
Average points score per candidate entering 2 or more subjects	14	17	20

Report by Miss G Owen
Mountain Ash Comprehensive School, 06/02/06

Number of pupils who achieved a GNVQ Intermediate or NVQ at level 2	-		
Number of pupils who achieved a GNVQ Advanced or NVQ at level 3	-		

Appendix D

Evidence base of the inspection

Fourteen inspectors spent a total of 45 days in the school and were joined by the school's deputy headteacher as Nominee. They held a meeting before the inspection.

During the inspection, inspectors visited:

- 116 lessons, 73 in the six subjects inspected and 43 in other subjects;
- registrations and assemblies; and
- some extra-curricular activities in the community.

Members of the inspection team met with:

- staff and governors before the inspection. (No parents attended the pre-inspection meeting);
- senior managers, middle managers, teachers, support assistants and administrative staff;
- groups of pupils representing each year group;
- representatives of the school council; and
- a wide range of representatives of outside organisations which have links to the school.

The team also considered:

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

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

Appendix E

Composition and responsibilities of the inspection team

Team member	Responsibilities
Miss Glynis Owen	Rgl: Context, Summary, Recommendations, KQ1, KQ5, Appendix
Mr David Williams	Core: KQ2
Mr Jeffrey Hanney	Core: KQ3
Mrs Judith Roberts	Core: KQ4
Mr Angus Dunphy	Core: KQ6 &KQ7
Mr Edward Tipper	Core: Contributing to KQ7.1-7.3 & Attendance
Mrs Ann Norbury	Contributing to KQ4: Additional learning needs
Dr Alan Cooke	Mathematics
Mr David Hughes	Lead science
Mr Glyn Davies	Supporting science
Mr Michael Pickin	Information Technology
Mr Gareth Barker	History
Mrs Margaret Herbert	Child Development and CACHE
Mrs Julia Hopkins	Business Studies
Mr Christopher Saunders	Nominee

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