

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

*Newbridge Comprehensive School  
Bridge Street  
Newbridge  
Newport*

*School Number: 676-4031*

*Date of Inspection: 24-28 March 2003*

*by*

*Miss Glynis Owen  
Registered Inspector*

*Date: 15 May 2003*

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## **CURRICULUM NOMENCLATURE AND KEY STAGES**

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

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

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

Key Stage(KS) 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 some shortcomings.
4. Unsatisfactory: some satisfactory work but shortcomings in important areas.
5. Poor: many shortcomings.

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## 1. CONTEXT

### **The school and its priorities**

Newbridge Comprehensive School is an 11-16, mixed community school, maintained by Caerphilly County Borough Council. There are 921 pupils on roll, compared to 746 at the time of the last inspection. The school serves the small town of Newbridge and the lower western valley. Some parents out of the catchment area are increasingly choosing to send their children to the school.

Pupils generally come from areas which are neither particularly advantaged nor particularly disadvantaged; a minority comes from economically disadvantaged areas. Sixteen per cent of pupils are entitled to free school meals, a figure below the national average of 20 per cent. All pupils speak English as their first language. There are a few pupils from other ethnic heritages.

Pupils represent the full range of ability, though there is an above average proportion of less able pupils. The attainment of each year group entering the school is improving year by year. Twenty-six pupils have statements of special educational needs (SEN) and a further 108 pupils have been identified as needing some support, a below average proportion overall. On site, the school houses the Unitary Authority's (UA) Centre for Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, where there are up to 21 pupils at Key Stage (KS) 3.

The headmaster and one deputy headteacher have remained in post since the time of the last inspection. The other deputy headteacher was appointed almost three years ago.

The school has clear aims and objectives and a development plan to translate those aims into practice.

## 2. MAIN FINDINGS

### **The main findings of the report**

Newbridge Comprehensive School is a good school which is going from strength to strength.

### **Educational Standards Achieved**

#### **Good features**

- Standards were at least satisfactory in all classes observed. They were good or very good in 72 per cent, including 25 per cent in which standards were very good. These are unusually high figures, particularly the proportion of very good standards, and significantly above the current national targets.
- Standards are very good in both key stages in information technology, history, geography, German and religious education/studies. They are also very good in music at KS4.
- Standards are good in the large majority of other subjects.
- Standards have improved significantly since the last inspection.
- Standards in pupils' key skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology (ICT) across the curriculum are good.
- Pupils of all abilities make good progress.

- There is developing emphasis on extending the gifted and talented.
- Pupils with SEN achieve well in small groups.
- Girls do particularly well. Their results in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) were above the national average in 2002.
- Results in the National Curriculum (NC) tests at the end of KS3 have improved year on year and were broadly in line with the national average in 2002, with results in science and mathematics above average.
- Results at GCSE have improved since the last inspection. They are now generally above the average locally and close to the national average in all indicators. They are also above average in comparison with schools of a similar intake.

**Shortcomings**

- There are some shortcomings in standards in English, design and technology, and child development which renders them satisfactory as opposed to good. Standards in the newly introduced drama course at KS4 are also satisfactory but developing.
- The progress of a small minority of pupils of average to lower ability is hampered by failure to complete homework and by poor presentation of written work.
- Whilst overall attendance is satisfactory at just over 90 per cent, the progress of a small minority of pupils is adversely affected by sporadic or longer-term absence. Work missed through absence is not always completed.
- Boys' results have been well below those of girls' overall, and particularly in English.

**Standards in subjects:**

Subject	KS3	KS4
English	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Mathematics	Good	Good
Science	Good	Good
Design and Technology	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Information Technology	Very Good	Very Good
Welsh	Good	Good
History	Very Good	Very Good
Geography	Very Good	Very Good
Modern Foreign Languages	German: Very Good French: Good	German: Very Good French: Good
Music	Good	Very Good
Physical Education	Good	Good
Religious Education	Very Good	Good
Religious Studies	-	Very Good
Child Development	-	Satisfactory
Drama	Good	Satisfactory
Catering	-	Good

Unfortunately, art could not be inspected because of the lack of availability of an inspector.

**Standards in key skills**

Listening	Good
Speaking	Good
Reading	Good
Writing	Good
Numeracy	Good
ICT	Good

**Quality of Education Provided****Good features**

- Teaching was at least satisfactory in all classes observed, and good or very good in 74 per cent, including 30 per cent in which teaching was very good. These are unusually high figures, particularly the proportion of very good teaching, and well above the current national targets.
- There is much innovative teaching, assisted by the latest interactive whiteboard technology installed in 19 classrooms.
- The very good provision of computers (one to every three pupils) extends pupils' learning experiences, especially in terms of resources for research. The school is at the leading edge of developments in ICT.
- The well-stocked and attractive library also extends these experiences and is open all day as well as for an hour after school.
- There is a strong learning culture in the school and very good behaviour and attitudes in lessons.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced, with several recent innovations such as drama and short course GCSE options, and greater flexibility planned for next year.
- Pupils' progress is closely monitored and parents kept informed formally three times a year.
- There is a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities to support learning, develop pupils' talents and broaden their range of experience through visits in the United Kingdom and abroad.
- Links with partner primary schools are very good. Not only do they ease transition, but they provide continuity in learning from 5-16 in a range of subjects. Links with the local college, for post-16 education are very good.
- Careers education and guidance and work experience are also very good.
- The very good links with the community and the good links with industry extend curricular experiences.
- The learning support department and the UA centre for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, based on the school site, offer good provision and support.

**Shortcomings**

- There are few courses of a vocational nature at KS4.
- The systems of marks and grades for pupils' day-to-day work vary between and within subjects and comments do not always clearly show the way to improve.

## **Pupils' Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development**

### **Good features**

- The school has a strong corporate ethos in which pupils can develop as individuals. They are proud of their school.
- This ethos is based on mutual respect, very good relationships and care for others.
- Pupils are polite and friendly to visitors and supportive of one another. Many pupils show mature and responsible attitudes.
- There is a clear framework of discipline. Any incidents of misbehaviour are very well managed. Good behaviour and service to the school are rewarded.
- Pastoral care is strong. Members of senior and middle management, and individual teachers spend much time helping individuals.
- Parents are contacted at an early stage and there are good links with external support services when appropriate.
- Assemblies and religious education make a good impact on pupils' spiritual development, which is good overall.
- Their moral, social and cultural development is also good.
- The quality of personal and social education (PSE) is very good and valued by pupils. No classes could be observed during the week of inspection.
- There are many opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively and show initiative. Older pupils gain experience of leadership as prefects.

### **Shortcomings**

- On days when they do not attend an assembly, not all pupils take part in an act of worship in tutor groups, though there is a 'Moment of Reflection' in many groups. Statutory requirements are thus not met.

## **Leadership and Efficiency**

### **Good features**

- The school is very well led and effectively managed by the headmaster and two deputy headteachers.
- Senior managers give a strong lead in implementing educational priorities and initiatives, with much personal warmth, good humour and concern for individuals.
- Governors are fully involved in strategic planning and evaluation.
- There are good links between senior and middle managers, with an appropriate focus on standards, teaching and learning.
- There is much good practice at middle management level, in both academic and pastoral areas.
- A self-evaluative culture is developing well. The school knows its strengths and areas for development and is planning appropriately to build on current success.
- Staff are well qualified and deployed effectively to teach their subject specialisms.

- Professional development is good, as is support for those staff new to the school. The school gained Investors in People status five years ago for the quality of its staff development.
- Conscientious support staff contribute effectively to the smooth running of the school.
- There has been careful financial planning in order to develop the ICT facilities substantially, to refurbish sections of the accommodation by turn and to build facilities for drama.
- The school is very well resourced overall.
- Progress on the key issues from the last inspection has been good.

### **Shortcomings**

- Planning for the promotion of pupils' key skills of literacy and numeracy, evident in some departments, is not co-ordinated across the curriculum. Practice is thus to some extent inconsistent within and between subjects.
- There are some shortcomings in departments which have not been identified and eliminated through monitoring procedures. Good practice in certain areas has not been sufficiently promoted and shared.
- The school is currently in a significant period of growth and the accommodation is tight for the present number on roll. The addition of three or four teachers and approximately 50 pupils next September will add to the pressure on the current accommodation. There are also a few shortcomings related to the accommodation. A few health and safety issues were reported to the school.

## **3. EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS**

### **3.1 Standards Achieved in Subjects and Areas of Learning**

Standards are good in the large majority of subjects and very good in a significant number. There has been progress in all subjects and in examination results since the last inspection. In no subject or key stage are standards unsatisfactory.

At KS3, standards are very good in information technology, history, geography, German and religious education. They are good in mathematics, science, Welsh, French, music, physical education and drama. Standards are satisfactory in English and design and technology.

In the NC tests at the end of KS3, results have improved year on year. The percentage of pupils gaining level 5 and above, in the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science combined, rose from 45 to 46 to 50 in the last three years. In 2002, this figure was only one per cent below the national figure, and above average for schools of a similar intake. Results in science have been highest, and results in both science and mathematics above the national average, and in the top 25 per cent of schools with a similar intake. Results in English have been below the average nationally and for schools of a similar intake.

At KS4, standards are very good in information technology, history, geography, German, music and religious studies. They are good in mathematics, science, Welsh, French, physical education, catering and statutory religious education. Standards are satisfactory in English, design and technology, child development and in the recently introduced drama course, where they are developing.

Results at GCSE have also improved year on year and the percentage of pupils gaining five or more grades A\*-C in 2002 was the highest to date at 47 per cent. This figure was above the local average of 43 per cent and just below the national figure of 50 per cent. Across the full range of grades (A\*-G), the percentage equalled that locally and was again just below the national figure. Only five per cent of pupils left school without qualifications, as nationally. In the core subjects, results have been at or above the national average in most years in mathematics and science. English results have been below but show an improving trend. In comparison with schools of a similar intake, the various indicators place the school generally above average and in comparison with pupils' prior attainment, results show a measure of progress. This has been particularly strong in information technology, French, German, religious studies and biology over several years but is evident in most subjects, with the exception of English and child development over the last few years.

In the 196 classes observed during the inspection, standards were at least satisfactory in all. They were good or very good in 72 per cent, including 25 per cent in which standards were very good. These are all unusually high figures. They considerably surpass the national targets for 2002, for 95 per cent of lessons to be at least satisfactory, and 50 per cent good or very good. They are also a substantial improvement on those of the last inspection, when standards were judged at least satisfactory in just over 90 per cent of classes and good or very good in 35 per cent, with only a small proportion very good. Currently, the proportion of classes in which standards are good or very good is even higher at KS3 than at KS4 (76 per cent as opposed to 65 per cent). This is unusual and is a tribute to the very good continuity between KS2 and KS3, as well as to the high quality of teaching and very good attitudes shown by pupils.

Pupils of all abilities do well at the school. The most able are extended across the full range of subjects and at both key stages and, in 2002, the percentage of grades A\* and A at GCSE was in line with the national average, though with a smaller than average proportion of able pupils. Those who are gifted in art take GCSE a year early, with success and in the OCR ICT course, the most able progress to level 3, equivalent to post-GCSE standard. In extended speech and extended writing the most able do well, and use the opportunities in the library and through Internet access to express their conclusions from research. They use subject-specific terminology accurately and extend their knowledge through extra-curricular activities. The school's plans for extending the talented and gifted are already showing signs of success. At present, the areas in which they are not fully extended are the design aspects of design and technology, and the planning and evaluation of their work in physical education.

Pupils of average to lower ability do well on the whole and this is borne out in examination results overall. They apply themselves to the task in hand and are able to talk about their work with confidence. In history, information technology and religious education they achieve very well. In other subjects there is a small minority of pupils, mainly boys, who do not complete homework and who do not take sufficient pride in their written work. Difficulties in spelling also mar the work of the small minority and sporadic attendance results in gaps in their knowledge and understanding. In lessons when they have the opportunity to explore their knowledge and understanding in pairs and groups and take some responsibility for their progress, pupils do well. In a minority of classes in English, mathematics and science, pupils are too dependent on the teacher and lack confidence in putting forward ideas.

Pupils with SEN do well, mainly in small groups, with good learning support assistance, and particularly in Year (Y) 8-Y11. Pupils in Y7 do not yet reach their full potential through lack of concentration at times. Whilst there is some underachievement through absence, standards achieved in relation to ability are good in most subjects, and very good in science,

information technology, geography, modern foreign languages and religious education. At KS4, there is a good rate of success in entry level qualifications and pupils progress at their own speed through the OCR ICT qualifications, with success.

Both boys and girls make good progress generally in classes observed and there is no difference in standard in their oral work. However, boys' writing is less well presented, the content has less depth and technical errors of grammar and punctuation are more evident. Also, boys do less well in class in English and physical education. In examinations, results have varied to some extent year by year. In 2002, girls did much better than boys overall at GCSE, and particularly in English, a year in which there were many more boys than girls in Y11.

### **3.2 Standards Achieved in Key Skills across the Curriculum**

#### **Communication**

Standards in listening, speaking, reading and writing are good. Many departments plan to promote these key skills in their schemes of work, but this work is not co-ordinated across the curriculum. The lack of a literacy policy and co-ordinator results in some unevenness of experiences and standards across the curriculum. However, there is much good practice.

Pupils generally listen attentively to the teacher, to video extracts and cassettes, and to each other. Their respect for other pupils' views is evident in whole-class situations and in group work. Only in a very small minority of lessons, when teachers' presentations are long, does pupils' attention wander.

Pupils' oral skills are good. They use extended answers in many lessons and give presentations to the whole class in some. In pair and group work they debate and propose solutions to problems with confidence. However, standards of oral work in English are only satisfactory as pupils generally lack confidence in formal talk and do not always use Standard English. In mathematics and in some lessons in science, one-word answers are frequent and extended speech is not sufficiently encouraged. In other subjects, there is purposeful discussion with good use of technical vocabulary, particularly in design and technology, geography, history, information technology and physical education.

Pupils read well. Those who have reading difficulties on entering the school are identified and given extra help and support to boost their reading age, with success. Reading aloud is practised in several subjects, particularly history and geography, and is done well. Pupils also demonstrate that they can skim and scan texts for information and extract details appropriately in response to a question. The borrowing rate in the library is good, with many pupils reading for pleasure and for research purposes. The school effectively encourages library skills in Y7, and pupils read independently for project work at both key stages. They also make good use of ICT resources, including the Internet, for research and read data easily.

Written work is generally good in relation to ability but there is a small minority of middle to lower ability boys who do not take sufficient pride in the presentation of their work. A small minority of pupils of middle to lower ability also have difficulties with spelling, and absence results in gaps in their written work. However, there is much good writing by pupils of all abilities in a variety of forms: narrative, empathetic accounts, reports, speeches. Extended writing is evident in all subjects and at both key stages, and is particularly good in history, geography and religious education. Pupils also have good skills in making notes, choosing the most pertinent points and often displaying them in varied forms such as spider graphs and tables.

## **Numeracy**

Although the school has no numeracy policy across the curriculum, the standards in numeracy across the school in the various subjects are good. In mathematics, pupils can apply numerical rules appropriately, can draw graphs and can transform formulae according to their ability. In modern foreign languages, pupils can deal effectively with the coinage of the country, namely the Euro. In science, pupils can apply formulae correctly to solve the questions set and graph work is equally accurate.

In geography, pupils can use scales correctly to calculate distances from maps and again graph work is used when appropriate and reflects the very good standards in the subject. In history, Venn diagrams are used to good effect to represent data and in design and technology and food, pupils are able to measure lengths and weigh to an acceptable degree of accuracy. In the latter, they can apply ratio to change a recipe to one that meets their needs.

## **ICT**

Standards of achievement in ICT across the curriculum are good.

The school has continued to invest to provide a significant availability of computer resources including good Internet access and 19 interactive whiteboards and this has had an impact on standards of achievement in ICT in a number of subject areas. In music and geography standards are very good with pupils using available resources to compose music including for the school production and work independently to research and present high quality outcomes for project work. Standards are good in history, English, drama and design and technology. Pupils use ICT to research information and present it to a good standard in a variety of formats including PowerPoint presentations in history. In design and technology, pupils use a range of computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM) facilities to a good standard. In modern foreign languages, Welsh, mathematics, religious education and science standards are satisfactory with pupils again using ICT to research and present work to at least a satisfactory standard. Standards are unsatisfactory in physical education.

Where ICT is satisfactory or unsatisfactory within a subject area it is not sufficiently planned into the syllabus of either key stage to promote learning. In some subjects use is inconsistent and not embedded sufficiently enough into practice.

## **Other key skills**

Pupils are creative in a variety of media. They reach good standards of creative writing in English, Welsh and modern foreign languages. They think creatively in investigations, musical compositions, sequences of movement and in design and technology work. Only in a small minority of classes are these opportunities limited by undue prescription by teachers. Overall, pupils reach good standards across the curriculum.

These skills are also evident in the solving of problems. Pupils respond well to the challenge of investigations and enquiry-based learning in a wide range of subjects, both individually and in groups. The most able, in particular, think critically and show good leadership skills in organising group work to resolve problems. Pupils of all abilities contribute with interest, though such opportunities are more limited in English and physical education than in other subjects. Standards are very good in information technology, history, geography and religious education.

Collaborative skills are strong. Pupils not only co-operate well but are concerned about the well-being and success of others in the class or group. Boys and girls work together well, and teachers promote collaborative skills through varying methods of organising group work. Pupils' abilities to work effectively with others contribute significantly to the good standards they achieve.

Pupils work to improve their performance within a strong learning culture. The vast majority are well motivated to evaluate their progress and take heed of teachers' comments in order to improve. The small minority, particularly boys of middle to lower ability, do not take this responsibility sufficiently seriously. However, whilst most pupils contribute positively, the processes which help them to improve their own performance are not yet embedded consistently across the curriculum. These include self-assessment, comments on written work of how to improve and target-setting. Pupils' key skills in this area are less well developed than in other areas.

### **Overall**

Pupils have good key skills which enhance their progress in subjects across the curriculum.

## **4. ETHOS OF THE SCHOOL**

### **4.1 Pupils' Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development**

The school has a strong corporate ethos which is based upon mutual respect, very good relationships and a care for one another. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

Spiritual awareness is well developed in religious education where pupils are given opportunities to reflect upon the meaning of life, the wonders of creation and to consider their own beliefs and values. Time for reflection also occurs in English, drama, history, Welsh, geography and design technology. In some other subjects opportunities to add to this provision are missed. Pupils attend two assemblies each week. These are dignified, well constructed and have an appropriate message. Pupils participate by assisting with readings and providing music. These are occasions too when pupils' successes in all areas of school life are acknowledged and celebrated. On days when pupils do not attend assembly there is provision for a "Moment of Reflection" in the tutor group session. This is done very hurriedly in some groups with little time for reflection and does not happen at all in others. Statutory requirements for the provision of collective worship are therefore not met.

The emphasis upon moral development is good. Pupils are regularly called upon to make decisions regarding right and wrong. Discussion work in English, drama, history, geography, Welsh, music and particularly in religious education all promote pupils' moral development. Moral judgments are often the theme of assemblies and of the very well planned PSE programme which includes, among others, modules on health, sex, drugs, race and environmental issues. Pupils acquire a good understanding of the issues surrounding sustainable development in geography, science, design technology and religious education. The PSE programme and other subject areas ensure pupils' awareness of global citizenship. Concern for those less fortunate than themselves results in much charity work being undertaken by pupils of all ages.

Social development is strongly promoted. Relationships between pupils and teachers and between the pupils themselves are very good. Pupils are polite and friendly to visitors and are supportive of one another. There is a strong sense of community and pupils are proud of their school. They mix well socially and collaborate naturally and happily in pair and group work. The quality of pastoral care shown by form tutors, heads of year and members of the senior management team is a strong factor in enabling individuals to overcome personal difficulties as well as maintaining a calm and inclusive atmosphere for all. Pupils experience a close, happy and caring community. Staff and pupils enjoy each other's company on social trips thereby cementing already very good relations. The prefect system in Y11 provides an opportunity for pupils to contribute to the management of the school. They take on their

duties diligently and with pride. Pupils also benefit from the provision of a wide range of extra-curricular activities in a variety of sports, outdoor pursuits, music, drama, Young Enterprise and Duke of Edinburgh award schemes. Most subjects have after school clubs. Participation is good. A large cast was rehearsing for the school play at the time of the inspection, with much enthusiasm.

The school's provision for cultural development is good. Work in English, drama, modern foreign languages, history, geography, design technology, music and information technology contributes well to this development. The religious education department affords pupils the opportunity to experience something of the major world religions and this is enhanced by visits to places of worship. Outside speakers are used effectively in some subject areas, for example talks on NATO and the Holocaust in history. There is a race equality policy in place and pupils show respect for diversity. Several subjects especially history, English and Welsh make a significant contribution to pupils' understanding of the heritage and culture of Wales. Pupils attend residential Welsh language courses at Urdd camps at Llangrannog and are planning to go to Glan Llyn. Visits to the theatre, art galleries and museums are frequent. Foreign visits, while not widespread, do take place with a visit to Berlin being organised for later this year.

Interviews with pupils during the inspection bore witness to the success of the school's provision in these areas. Pupils have good social skills, have a keen sense of right and wrong and are very appreciative of the facilities and opportunities provided for them by the school.

The school has built upon the good practice referred to in the last inspection report but still does not meet requirements for a daily act of collective worship.

## **4.2 Behaviour and Attitudes**

Pupils' behaviour is very good in class. They have very good attitudes to learning and concentrate well. Only a very small number lack concentration. Behaviour around the school is good. During assemblies, at break times and in their movement around the school, pupils normally behave in an orderly manner, although some pushing and jostling in the passageways were observed during the inspection, and on getting onto buses after school. There is some litter, even though waste bins are provided.

The school has developed very good procedures for the handling of any misbehaviour by pupils. These consist of various stages to address indiscipline. At each stage, staff take appropriate actions, often involving pastoral support, in order to correct any behavioural problems. During the past twelve months there have been 29 temporary exclusions, involving 22 pupils, and six boys have been permanently excluded. The recording procedures are very good. Governors and parents were informed as appropriate.

The school provides useful opportunities for older pupils to take on responsibilities. All Y11 pupils are available to be selected as prefects, with no limit to their number. They are carefully chosen on the basis of published criteria and must have an attendance record of better than 90 per cent. Prefects' duties include helping staff, reading at assemblies and functions, supervision of movement around the school and fund-raising. The head boy and head girl often represent the school at external functions. There is currently no school council or buddy system.

As part of the school's merit scheme, pupils receive stickers, badges, certificates and vouchers for good work, improved behaviour, helpfulness and good citizenship. Parents are kept well informed of their children's successes and all concerned value this scheme.

The school's documentation clearly details the measures necessary to prevent any instances of bullying or racial harassment, none of which was witnessed during the inspection. As part

of the anti-bullying policy, all pupils have a clear statement in their diaries which outlines their responsibilities and the actions they should take if either they or anyone else is being bullied. Pupils and their parents are confident that the school takes speedy and effective action to correct any such situation should it occur.

### **4.3 Attendance**

Attendance levels are satisfactory having averaged 90.1 per cent during the past year. This figure is a little better than that at the last inspection but is still below the school's own target. Unauthorised absence was slightly higher than the Wales average for that period. However, much of this is caused by relatively few pupils with particularly poor attendance records. Also, the school does not authorise absence for holiday-taking during term time if the pupil's previous attendance level is less than 90 per cent. Average attendance during the current term to date has marginally improved to 90.2 per cent.

Since the last inspection, the school has introduced a range of good initiatives in an attempt to raise attendance levels. These include:

- the efficient use of a recently installed computerised monitoring system;
- the quick supply of the previous week's attendance statistics to form tutors and senior staff with pastoral responsibilities;
- the appointment of a clerk to concentrate on attendance matters;
- the rapid follow up by the school with parents in the event of their child's unexplained absence as part of a first day call system;
- the recent installation of a 24-hour absence telephone line;
- valuable assistance from and very good co-operation with the Education Welfare Officer who spends about half his week at the school;
- operation of 'good attendance' incentive schemes with appropriate rewards for pupils. Gift tokens and certificates are presented half-termly and annually.

Punctuality of pupils at the start of the school day and between lessons is generally good, though sometimes initial lateness is caused by delayed buses.

Registration procedures comply with National Assembly for Wales Circular 3/99.

## **5. QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

### **5.1 Teaching**

The quality of teaching is good overall, with a substantial proportion of very good teaching. Teaching was at least satisfactory in all 196 classes observed. It was good or very good in 74 per cent, including 30 per cent in which teaching was very good. These are unusually high figures, particularly the proportion of very good teaching and significantly above the current national targets of 95 per cent at least satisfactory and 50 per cent good or very good. They are also a considerable improvement on the figures at the last inspection. At that time, teaching was judged at least satisfactory in nearly 90 per cent of classes and good or very good in just over 40 per cent, including four per cent in which teaching was very good. Currently, teaching is good or very good in 76 per cent of classes at KS3, compared to 71 per cent at KS4.

There is currently good teaching in all subjects and some very good teaching in most. The proportion of very good teaching is highest in information technology, history, geography, modern foreign languages, religious education and music.

There are many factors which contribute to the high quality of teaching, and to its improvement since the last inspection. The staff, as a whole, are experienced teachers who form very good relationships with pupils and have high expectations of them in terms of work and behaviour. They have also been forward-looking in embracing the latest technology, up-dating their skills in this area, and using both interactive whiteboard technology and computers with enthusiasm. Careful financial planning and innovative resourcing by senior management has provided these facilities in 19 classrooms, together with banks of computers in many areas of the school.

The very good relationships between teachers and pupils contribute to a strong learning culture and mutual respect in classrooms. This also encourages pupils to support and help one another. Outside lessons, staff give generously of their time to help individuals and small groups, with coursework, revision for examinations and extra-curricular activities. Much praise and encouragement are given. However, if pupils misbehave and interrupt learning, action is taken within a clear system of sanctions.

Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons carefully. In the vast majority of lessons there is a variety of strategies and activities, which impart knowledge, test understanding and develop pupils' skills. Pupils have many opportunities for creative work, for solving problems and for undertaking individual research, with recourse to the library and ICT resources, including the Internet. The most able pupils are extended and those with learning difficulties have very good support from learning support assistants. Work is well matched to pupils' differing aptitudes and needs.

In those lessons judged satisfactory as opposed to good or very good, the most common shortcoming is a degree of over-direction by teachers which gives little opportunity to pupils to give extended answers or work collaboratively in groups. Some pupils become too reliant on the teacher and show little initiative or responsibility as independent learners. On occasions, the pace of lessons slows as there is insufficient challenge to pupils or a narrow range of strategies is used. These lessons are, however, a small minority of lessons in English, mathematics, science, design and technology and physical education.

Overall, the quality of teaching is a real strength of the school.

## **5.2 Assessment, Recording and Reporting**

The quality of the assessment, recording and reporting of pupils' achievement is good.

There is a whole-school policy that is based on sound principles. Whole-school guidelines on marking lack sufficient detail and lead to inconsistency of practice in day-to-day marking between departments. Teachers in all departments mark homework, classwork and tests and there is consistency of practice in some departments such as religious education, Welsh, in end of unit testing in science at KS4 and in the marking of coursework in English at KS4. However, there is insufficient monitoring by some heads of department which results in inconsistency of practice in day-to-day marking at KS3 in subjects such as history, mathematics, design and technology and science as well as in physical education at KS4. In some subjects, such as English and mathematics, grades and marks awarded by teachers are supplemented by appropriate use of diagnostic verbal comments but there is insufficient use across the curriculum of good oral feedback based on criteria for success. Most teachers in all departments use praise to encourage individual pupils. In subjects such as design technology, history, geography, ICT and English, teachers usually write comments on work that identify

strengths and weaknesses but there is inconsistency of this practice in some departments and insufficient use of such diagnostic marking to inform pupils' development in other subjects, particularly at KS3. As a result, pupils do not always know how improvement may be made. A variety of assessment methods are used, such as the end of unit tests, common tasks, annual examinations and trial examinations. Assessments are usually accurate apart from a minority of cases in mathematics. Pupils' involvement in their own and peer assessment is insufficiently widespread but there is good practice in history.

Homework is regularly set, although in a minority of cases it is not always completed. Most teachers keep accurate records of their pupils' marks, grades and test results although in English there is no recording of speaking and listening at KS3. Records are used to improve standards and there is particularly good use of records to set targets in religious education, history, geography and mathematics.

The school's database is comprehensive and there is very good analysis by the school's senior management team of external examination results, NC assessments and Fischer Family Trust data to set targets for individual pupils, departments and the whole school. In addition, the mathematics and English departments analyse data following the NFER testing of pupils in Y7 and Y8. Most departments use data for class organisation, examination entry and for tracking the progress of individual pupils. In November and February of each year, subject teachers are required to indicate the attainment and attitude of each pupil using a common grading system. Heads of year and heads of department review this data to identify underachievement and to acknowledge and celebrate achievement and progress. Heads of year review the progress of individual pupils across the curriculum so that parents are informed, pupils are supported and commendations awarded. In addition to this formal system of tracking progress, there is informal liaison between departments and heads of year on a day-to-day basis. The quality of liaison is very good as is the tracking of progress. There is good use of available data by the SEN department to evaluate teaching, to assist curricular planning and to ensure that teaching strategies are appropriate for each pupil although this good practice is insufficiently widespread outside the core subjects.

Information on progress is issued to parents twice a year based on the data provided by subject teachers. In addition a full report is issued annually. Arrangements to inform parents of progress are very good and there are also opportunities for parents to discuss their child's progress in annual meetings with subject teachers. Parents may also request a review of progress at any time. The quality of information on the full annual report varies from subject to subject. In many cases, comments by teachers lack subject specific detail.

At KS4, all pupils are involved in preparing for their Records of Achievement (RoA). The head of Y10 co-ordinates the process and all pupils in Y11 receive a comprehensive RoA. The school has recently introduced Pupils' Progress Files for pupils in Y9. The files will eventually replace RoAs. Pupils with SEN are assessed in line with the requirements of the Code of Practice. Detailed individual educational plans (IEPs) are in place and subject teachers make good use of them. Individual educational plans are regularly reviewed and there is an annual formal review involving parents.

### **5.3 Curriculum**

The school has appropriate curricular aims and objectives. It offers a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils that, for the most part, meets NC statutory requirements.

At KS3, all pupils follow the full range of NC subjects, religious education and drama. There are timetabled lessons in information technology and PSE and German is offered to the most able linguists in Y9. However the arrangements for German reduce pupils' experiences in

careers, drama and physical education. Statutory requirements are not met for this group. In Y7, Y8 and Y9, there is a combination of mixed ability and setted arrangements across the curriculum, which cater well for pupils' needs. The introduction of drama has made a significant contribution to the development of pupils' confidence and oral skills that has also benefited their progress in other subjects. There are no pupils for whom the NC is disappplied or modified.

All pupils at KS4 study a common core of English, mathematics, science, Welsh, physical education, religious education and PSE. Guided choice from four carefully constructed option blocks offering a range of mainly GCSE and a few OCR/RSA and Entry Level courses provides a balanced curriculum meeting NC requirements whilst catering for most pupils' individual interests. The introduction of short course GCSE options and a few new subjects have provided wider choice. As yet there are few courses of a vocational nature at KS4 although several curricular additions are under consideration. Good arrangements are in place for the very small number of KS4 pupils that follow Bridge Courses and Youth Access courses in the local college.

The PSE programme is very well planned although no classes could be observed during the week of the inspection. Careers education and guidance, introduced in Y9, and work experience, are also very good. Planning for the promotion of pupils' key skills of literacy and numeracy is not co-ordinated across the curriculum. Practice is thus inconsistent both within and between departments.

The timetable is organised as 50 one-hour periods a fortnight, thereby meeting the recommended total teaching time. The timetable is well constructed with an appropriate distribution of subject lessons throughout the fortnightly cycle.

The school has a well-considered policy on homework. In the majority of subjects, homework suitably complements work done in class, though there was evidence that a minority of pupils fail to complete homework. The school provides a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities to support learning, develop pupils' talents and broaden their range of experiences.

#### **5.4 Support, Guidance and Pupils' Welfare**

The quality of support and guidance offered to pupils is very good and is a strength of the school. Pupils feel they are in a safe, supportive and caring environment. They know that they will receive every assistance from their teachers and that if they have any difficulties they will be dealt with quickly and efficiently.

The school has a clearly defined pastoral system. The deputy head with pastoral responsibility leads the team very well. Good links with feeder primary schools and well-established routines for the transfer of pupils help them to settle quickly and happily. The Y7 pastoral team is, as far as possible, made up of staff experienced in this area who understand the problems associated with transition and are keen to minimise them. From Y8 onwards heads of year and form tutors stay with the same cohort. Staff and pupils know each other well. Regular meetings take place between the pastoral deputy and the heads of year and between the heads of year and the form tutors. Bullying is not tolerated and clear procedures are in place to deal with any incidents. Pupils know what these procedures are and feel confident about their effectiveness.

Very good relations exist between pupils and subject teachers who are supportive and approachable. They give freely of their time to aid the progress of individual pupils and in many subjects extra tuition and guidance are given during the lunch hour and after school particularly to support KS4 pupils. Revision guides are also provided by a number of

departments. Pupils are known and valued as individuals and considerable support is given both academically and with personal matters.

Across the key stages one lesson in the fortnightly cycle is devoted to PSE. The programme is very well organised by the co-ordinator and is in line with the Qualification, Curriculum and Assessment Authority (ACCAC) PSE Framework and Guidance. Sex education and drug awareness modules contain appropriate detail with Y8 benefiting from a drug awareness day delivered by the local police. Health education and issues relating to sustainable development and global citizenship are well featured. Personal and Social Education is taught by “specialist” teachers who take on a module of the programme and deliver it to the whole year group. This allows staff to develop expertise in their particular area and pupils appreciate delivery by a range of teachers. Very good use is made of outside speakers including speakers from the police, trading standards and road safety officers and the young mothers’ project. Pupils take part in road safety and consumer quizzes at county level. Across the key stages, the PSE programme is enhanced by the attention to ethical and moral issues in religious education and to environmental and citizenship questions in geography, history, science and English. At KS4, the PSE programme is also complemented well by an Entry Level Life Skills programme. No PSE lessons could be seen during the week of the inspection.

The provision for careers education and guidance is very good and is in line with the ACCAC WRE framework and guidance. The programme is very well managed by the careers education co-ordinator. Careers education forms part of the PSE programme in all years except Y9 when pupils, except those who take up German, have one discrete lesson in the fortnightly timetable. Those taking German receive some careers guidance at another time. Pupils are well prepared for the option choices at the end of Y9 in lessons, through one to one interviews and a parents’ evening. Pupils in Y10 benefit from two weeks’ work experience and throughout KS4, pupils are well prepared for the 16+ transition into further education. The school works well with Careers Wales Gwent, the local careers provider and with Coleg Gwent at Crosskeys which is the destination of many pupils at 16. Lecturers from Crosskeys speak to all Y9 pupils on “Life after Newbridge” and taster days are provided for several subjects not taught to GCSE level. All Y11 pupils enjoy an induction day at Crosskeys and the school also arranges visits to the college at Ystrad Mynach and the agricultural college at Usk. The careers programme makes very good use of outside speakers and benefits from its involvement in a variety of initiatives such as the Dynamo project and the Impact Theatre group. Pupils attend ACE (Aiming for college education) days at the University of Glamorgan. All Y11 pupils have mock interviews with members of the local Rotary Club. Pupils benefit too from access to a well resourced careers library.

There is a clear policy on child protection with a named teacher and guidance on recognising key signs and appropriate action to be taken by teachers. Procedures for ensuring the health and safety of pupils are good. A few health and safety issues relating mainly to the accommodation were reported to the school.

Since the last report, the school has maintained and enhanced its high standards in support and guidance for pupils.

## **5.5 Provision for Pupils with SEN**

The provision for pupils with SEN and the effectiveness of school policies for pupils with SEN are good and therefore a strong aspect of the school’s overall provision for its pupils.

The school has a very positive, constructive and supportive attitude towards pupils with SEN and consequently standards of achievement are good in both the special classes and in mainstream classes.

Pupils with SEN are consistently well motivated and have access to a broad and balanced curriculum that helps them to make consistently good progress.

Pupils with SEN are taught in appropriate accommodation by an adequate number of suitably qualified and experienced staff.

Pupils with SEN are well integrated into the life and work of the school through the effective deployment and judicious use of all available professional and material resources. Pupils are well supported in the development of their physical and inter-personal skills and, though the standard of attainment for many pupils with SEN is below age-related norms, it nonetheless represents significant achievement for those individual pupils.

The school complies fully with the requirements of the Code of Practice and has accurately assessed and identified 108 pupils for inclusion on the School Action and School Action Plus register. A further 26 pupils have a statement of SEN. There are no pupils with NC disapplications.

Pupils are screened on entry to the school and those with the greatest need are placed in a discrete Learning Support group. These pupils follow the same curriculum as mainstream pupils and the department has a good record of raising the standards of pupils' basic skills and re-integrating them successfully back into mainstream classes.

Pupils with SEN usually take Entry Level examinations at the end of Y11 with good levels of success. Some pupils also take a small number of GCSE examinations and the school intends to extend this practice in future years.

The current head of learning support was appointed in September 2002 and is effective in both curricular and administrative terms. She leads the department with a clear strategic vision and very well developed inter-personal skills. There is good evidence of strong teamwork within the department and the provision of useful and appropriate information and guidance to all staff have enhanced the quality of SEN provision across the school. Special educational needs policies and procedures are well developed and implemented by the majority of staff.

Learning support assistants are very effectively deployed. They perform a range of important functions throughout the day and are well briefed and clearly focused on supporting the learning and care needs of all pupils with SEN. They make significant contributions to pupils' progress and development.

Individual educational plans are drawn up in consultation with parents/carers and pupils taking account of age, maturity and capability and typically contain two or three short-term targets, teaching strategies, resources required, a review framework and the expected or targeted outcomes. The targets within IEPs are challenging, specific and appropriate to pupils' needs. They pay due care and attention to the viewpoints of all contributors, including pupils. For example, one pupil objects to the phrase 'learning difficulties' and this has been removed from the pupil's IEP with parental consent. There are regular updates of pupils' behaviour, attitude, progress and development in the form of a running commentary along with records of contact with external agencies such as Speech and Language Therapy, Physiotherapy, Educational Psychology and Educational Welfare kept, with the departmental 'Green' file. This file is accessible to all staff and provides a rich source of information on current developments and pupils' progress within the department.

Good arrangements are in place to ensure that the governing body is well informed on mainstream and specialist provision for pupils with SEN.

The school has made good progress since the last inspection.

**EBD Centre Provision**

The school hosts an EBD Centre on behalf of Caerphilly County Borough Council that provides for up to 21 pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties drawn from the 16 secondary schools in the borough.

The Centre is staffed by three teachers and four learning support assistants. Extensive refurbishment took place during the Summer of 2002 in order to provide the high quality learning environment the Centre now offers. The Centre provides a broad and balanced curriculum and places a high importance on the need to ensure continuity and commonality with the mainstream curriculum.

Given the level of staffing at the Centre it is inevitable that some subjects are not taught by subject specialists. However, the good links that exist between the Centre and mainstream staff ensure that there is no longer a narrowing of the range of learning experiences provided for pupils. This is good progress since the last inspection.

In the context of pupils' individual learning and care needs, standards within the Centre are consistently good across the curriculum. Staff possess in-depth knowledge, understanding and awareness of pupils' needs and carry out collaborative diagnostic assessments of each pupil's needs prior to producing IEPs, Individual Behaviour Plans (IBPs) and Individual Curriculum Plans (ICPs) all of which contribute to the overall progress and development of pupils. At each stage pupils and parents/carers are fully involved in the process. Targets within these documents are appropriate and they are regularly evaluated, reviewed and updated.

Pupils in the Centre concentrate well, they evaluate their own work and make suggestions for how they might improve. The majority of pupils work sensibly and effectively in class because of the very good relationships that exist between staff and pupils and because of the high quality of teaching, the high expectations, the reward system in place and the busy, purposeful pace to lessons.

The Centre aims to re-integrate pupils back into mainstream schools wherever possible and has a very good record of success in this respect. There are good links between staff at the Centre and mainstream departments who provide curriculum support and appropriate materials for pupils at the centre. A formal record of meetings between Centre and mainstream staff is kept though there are also many informal links where information is shared verbally or through written documentation, all of which contribute significantly to the overall provision.

Support staff are very effectively deployed. They perform many important functions throughout the day and are well briefed and clearly focused on supporting the learning and behavioural objectives targeted for each pupil as well as assisting in the general administrative and daily routine requirements of the Centre. They are conscientious and effective and make significant contributions to pupils' progress and development.

The Centre has made good progress since the last inspection.

## **5.6 Partnership with Parents and Community, Schools and Other Institutions**

The school has a good partnership with parents and very good links with a wide range of organisations in the local community.

Although only about five per cent of parents responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire and few attended the meeting, a very large majority of these expressed support for the school. Information provided by the school through newsletters, reports, meetings and letters is mainly of good quality but the governors' annual report to parents and the school prospectus do not contain all the information statutorily required. Nearly all parents have responded to the home/school agreement. The Parent and Teacher Association (PTA) helps at functions and runs social events which raise significant funds to help the school, including the provision of prizes.

The school has good relationships with local agencies including the UA, Education Welfare Service (EWS), social and medical services, including the education psychologist and the school nurse who monitors pupils' general health. A local charity organisation, 'Include', contributes in a small but significant way to the support of several pupils needing additional help.

The school has a very good relationship with the very committed community police officer who visits the school regularly. He advises both staff and pupils about crime prevention and also gives valuable support by talking to groups of pupils about matters concerning their personal safety and substance misuse. All Y8 pupils recently attended 'The Event', a drugs awareness day arranged by Gwent police. A wide range of other members of the local community also provide effective support for the school's PSE programme.

The school has a successful working partnership with the on-site leisure centre with the sharing of many facilities and resources. Members of the local community are able to use the school's information technology facilities and attend adult learning classes, using the school's accommodation and resources.

There are good links with local churches. The vicar and other local ministers lead assemblies and support the curriculum. The school's annual carol service is held at the local church.

There are very good links with primary schools. The headmaster and head of Y7, subject co-ordinators and the SEN co-ordinator (SENCO) regularly visit to talk to Y6 pupils and their parents. These pupils attend taster days, lessons and sports/social events at Newbridge and their teachers visit the school to share subject expertise. Year 9 pupils have made a video of the school to show to Y6 pupils. The transfer of other good quality information, both curricular and personal, enables them to make as smooth a transfer as possible to the secondary school. Some pupils take part in work experience placements at the primary schools. The outstanding feature of the links is the work done through the 'Newbridge Partnership' to form a continuum of education from 5-18. This includes detailed schemes of work in English, mathematics, ICT, PSE and soon, science. There are particularly good links with Crosskeys College, with the majority of pupils continuing their education there. All Y11 pupils and their form tutors spend a whole day there which is followed by members of the college staff returning to the school to enrol them and discuss their future. There are also links with colleges at Pontypool, Ystrad Mynach and Usk, the University of Glamorgan and Initial Teacher Training Institutions.

Pupils entertain local retired people at an annual concert and deliver prepared hampers at Christmas time.

## 5.7 Partnership with Industry

The school has a good partnership with local companies which gives pupils a good introduction to the world of work around them.

About eighty local businesses and other concerns provide industrial placements to enable all Y10 pupils to undertake two weeks' work experience every May. The local Careers Wales office supports this programme. Most pupils not only obtain practical experience of the workings of business, but also increase their sense of responsibility, self-esteem, personal and social skills.

The adviser from Careers Wales Gwent attends the school several days each week and gives good quality support. He encourages KS3 pupils to assess their strengths and interests for future employment in 'The Real Game' and introduces them to the good quality careers library. He also advises them and their parents on options choices and future career possibilities. All pupils in KS4 receive individual help with the development of a career plan. Fifteen members of the local Rotary Club help pupils with mock interviews and advice about the world of work. The careers office also arranges for some pupils requiring additional support to obtain extra careers advice, and the school is used as an example of good practice in these areas. Business people set pupils tasks related to aspects of the world of work such as marketing, costing and quality control. These activities help pupils develop their teamwork, decision-making and planning skills.

The school receives support from many local organisations through the donation of money and/or materials.

As part of the Business Dynamics Programme, 15 local business people and representatives from services and agencies provide Y9 pupils with good opportunities to enhance their entrepreneurial and other skills. The Dynamo Initiative furthers their understanding of entrepreneurship. Pupils also learn about the world of work through an annual well-organised Young Enterprise project which involves them in forming a company to produce and market products. The school has recently won two awards in the area competitions in which they had to present their work to an external audience.

In the areas above, the school fully meets the recommendations of the ACCAC WRE Framework.

Although some school departments have few links with local companies, pupils have opportunities to learn about work through a wide range of industrial visits. For example, those studying design and technology have recently visited several catering establishments and a packaging company. They have also been successful in a design project with a local furniture company.

Several members of staff have industrial experience and a few have recently attended business-related courses to support the teaching of their subjects.

The school has no specific policy on partnership with industry.

## 6. MANAGEMENT

### 6.1 Quality of Self-Evaluation and Planning for Improvement

The quality of self-evaluation and planning is good.

The self-evaluation document prepared for the inspection was an exemplar of good practice, showing a detailed and comprehensive knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for

further development. The headmaster and two deputy headteachers are each linked to a cluster of departments and monitor classroom practice in those areas. Minutes of meetings are also used as a means of communication between the headmaster and all departments, annotated to feedback comments. One deputy headteacher, in charge of pastoral care, has regular meetings with each head of year to discuss problems and wider issues. The three senior managers know staff and pupils well as individuals, and they work effectively as a team to drive the school forward, as well as to resolve issues which arise.

At middle management level there is much good practice in monitoring lessons and pupils' work. Appropriate systems are in place, though peer observation is better developed in some departments than in others, for the sharing of best practice.

However, whilst monitoring has many good features, it is not always sufficiently rigorous in identifying shortcomings or in feeding into the process of planning for improvement.

Governors are aware of the school's strengths and areas for development, through detailed reports, the analysis of data and through discussions with heads of department at governors' meetings. The reviews from external consultants and the parental perceptions survey, conducted by an outside agency, have also fed into the process of self-evaluation, to good effect.

Very good use is also made of data on pupils' abilities and examination results to analyse performance. These include various tests on entry, measured against external test results, benchmark and value-added data. These are shared with departments, with a growing emphasis on analysis at middle management level.

The identified areas for improvement are appropriate at whole-school level, and the issues identified by inspectors already within the school's targeted areas. There is long-term planning, with related financial planning for large-scale expenditure, and an appropriate current school development plan (SDP), with timescales and success criteria. It is drawn up after good consultation, including the involvement of all heads of department in the Development and Management Group. There is also good correlation between the SDP and departmental development plans, which aim to deliver whole-school issues as well as subject-specific targets.

At departmental level, these good features are also evident, but planning is not always sufficiently detailed to eliminate shortcomings, nor related closely enough to the results of the monitoring procedures. It is good in most subjects but satisfactory in English, science and physical education, where the above shortcomings are evident.

The improvement in standards and teaching since the last inspection is testament to the processes and culture of self-evaluation and planning which have developed since that time, at all levels within the school.

## **6.2 Leadership and Efficiency**

The school is very well led and effectively managed. Standards, teaching and behaviour are all of high quality and the school has improved significantly since the last inspection. The accommodation and resources have also improved considerably. The school is forward-looking and, particularly in ICT, is at the leading edge of development. There is a strong corporate ethos and learning culture and all sections of the school are proud of their association with it.

The headmaster gives a clear lead, ably supported by two deputy headteachers. Together they make a strong team which takes the school forward on educational priorities, and also with much personal warmth, good humour and concern for individuals. Their roles and

responsibilities are clearly defined and carried out effectively in practice. Currently, they are a small team for a school of this size and the addition of an assistant headteacher after Easter will give them added strength for continuous improvement.

Governors show strong support for the school and work efficiently through committees and meetings of the full governing body to evaluate the school's current performance and plan for the future.

At middle management level, there is much good management practice. Most heads of department and heads of year lead their teams with focus, and achieve a good level of consistency and collaborative spirit. Documentation is generally good, a self-evaluative culture has developed well and staff are receptive to new ideas and practice. The quality of management is reflected in the standards achieved by pupils, and is particularly good in those subjects in which standards are very good. Newly appointed heads of department in design and technology and drama are also having a significant impact. There is not yet sufficient co-ordination in English to ensure consistent approaches and the promotion of best practice. The management of some whole-school issues is very good, particularly ICT and PSE, with very good management also of careers education and work experience.

The management of resources is very good at senior management level and good at middle management level. The provision of interactive whiteboard technology for teaching in 19 classrooms and the high ratio of computers to pupils is unusually good. These resources are used well by most but not all departments, and four central ICT rooms are not booked regularly by all. Staff are deployed effectively to teach their subject specialisms, to good effect, though the pupil-teacher ratio is slightly high this year and there are plans to improve the deployment in science and design and technology. Planning for an increase in the staffing to cover the growth in the number of pupils next year has been good. Time during the school day is used well, with an obvious pace and emphasis on good time-keeping.

There has been good planning to improve the accommodation on a rolling programme, and to develop facilities for drama. The current accommodation is used well, but the growth in numbers is already making demands on the available space and a further increase in September will add considerably to these demands.

Since the last inspection, the school has striven to build up reserves to finance the above resources and extend the facilities for drama, currently being built. Thus in this financial year it has used up those reserves, with longer term planning based on increased pupil numbers. Funding to departments is appropriately based on both maintenance and development, and overall the school is very well resourced. Financial planning is clearly linked to development planning. The latest auditor's report was, however, critical of financial procedures in certain areas and the school has agreed to implement recommendations in those areas.

The school is efficiently managed on a day-to-day basis. There is a comprehensive staff handbook, weekly briefing and bulletin, and minutes of meetings are circulated. Communication channels are clear. Conscientious administrative staff contribute substantially to the smooth running of the school, with the office a key central area in these communication links both within the school and with the wider community.

Statutory requirements are met except for the daily act of collective worship, the inclusion of details in the prospectus and governors' annual report to parents, and provision in physical education for those pupils in Y9 who take German.

### **6.3 Staffing, Accommodation and Learning Resources**

The school has 50 full time teachers including the headteacher. There are three part-time teachers giving a full-time equivalent of 51.2. The current pupil to teacher ratio is relatively high at 19.1:1, this year. The staffing structure is generally appropriate to the school's needs but is under review with a few additions planned to match curriculum changes and an increasing number of pupils on roll.

Overall the staff is very experienced and well qualified. Staff turnover is low. The majority have served at the school for more than ten years and a substantial proportion for longer. Qualifications and experience are appropriate for effective delivery of the national and wider curricula. Some have previous experience in industry. Teachers are deployed effectively to cover their curricular and pastoral roles; there is very little non-specialist teaching and where it does occur, there is no adverse effect on standards. The relatively small but very effective school leadership team of headmaster and two deputy headteachers has an appropriate blend of experience and expertise.

The professional development of teachers is good. It is appropriately linked to the SDP and departmental development plans and attempts to achieve a balance between individual teachers' needs and whole-school needs. Newly qualified teachers and others new to the school receive good support and are quickly integrated into the life and work of the school. The school gained Investor in People status five years ago for the quality of its staff development.

Administrative, technical, and other non-teaching staff provide very effective service and make a very valuable contribution to the smooth functioning of the school.

#### **Accommodation**

The school occupies a compact site and consists of four blocks of buildings grouped around two recreation areas and the adjacent Newbridge Leisure centre. The buildings throughout the school are clean and well cared for, though pupils drop litter at lunchtimes.

Most subjects are taught in specialist suites of rooms that, for the most part, are visually attractive learning environments. All full-time teachers have their own base room. A few rooms, including practical activity rooms, are relatively small and are quite crowded when occupied by big classes. Insufficient storage space is a problem in some areas and office accommodation throughout the school is limited. Dining facilities are inadequate for the number of pupils although some limited improvements are already underway.

The school places a high priority on site development and has invested a substantial amount in recent years to improve the quality of the accommodation. There has been a significant upgrading in many areas. A new drama facility is currently under construction. Other areas such as one modern foreign language room, science, music, art and food/textile technology are in need of some refurbishment. This is clearly identified within a well-considered site development plan.

The school has exclusive use during the school day of the very good physical education facilities of the leisure centre. The changing rooms are in very poor condition however. A significant amount of teaching time is often lost as classes move to and from the playing fields that are some distance away from the school.

During the inspection, a few health and safety issues relating to the accommodation were drawn to the attention of the headmaster.

## Learning Resources

The school is very well resourced overall. It spends a good proportion of its available budget on teaching and learning materials and equipment. Departmental resources for learning are generally good. However, some in mathematics and science need updating or augmenting. The lack of a recording studio facility in music limits the range of experiences which can be offered.

Many departments develop their own teaching materials. These are of good quality and are often adapted to cater for the range of ability within classes. The care and use of available resources are good in all departments.

Information and communications technology resources are very good. The school pupil to computer ratio is 3.2:1 and there are also 19 interactive whiteboards currently available within the school. There are plans to improve this provision even further. All subject departments have several computers of their own. Computers in the library area and, when not in use for discrete information technology lessons, those in the ICT suites, are used by departments to enable pupils to work individually. This very good provision extends pupils' learning experiences, especially in terms of resources for research.

The attractive library area is well stocked with a good range of books and other learning resources that are well used. It is open all day and for an hour after school. A full-time librarian effectively manages the use of the library and its development into a learning resource centre. A separate careers education room is also well provided with good quality, up-to-date resources that are effectively used.

Many out-of-school resources are appropriately used to enrich pupils' educational experiences. Pupils visit many places of interest and follow up these visits with work in class. Speakers from a wide range of interests in the community also contribute substantially to pupils' experiences.

## 7. SUBJECTS AND AREAS OF LEARNING

### Standards achieved by pupils

#### English

Standards of achievement are satisfactory at KS3 and KS4. At both key stages, standards are similar to those achieved in external examinations. The achievement of girls exceeds that of boys.

#### Good features

##### KS3 and KS4

- The large majority of pupils, including those with SEN, listen intently to the teacher and to one another.
- They respond to questions, recall information and explain.
- Able pupils use a technical vocabulary as well as Standard English when it is required.
- In class discussion, pupils demonstrate a sound knowledge of texts and understanding which is in line with abilities.
- The majority of pupils read aloud with accuracy and fluency.

- All pupils, including those with SEN, read a wide range of challenging texts including visual images. Pupils in Y7 read for pleasure and many pupils engage effectively in research.
- Able pupils and some of middle abilities use higher order reading skills and appreciate stylistic devices used for effect.
- The majority of pupils write in a range of formats and for a variety of purposes.
- The majority of pupils improve writing by drafting and by the use of computers.
- The writing of able pupils at both key stages is usually well-structured and there is technical competence, appropriate length and detail, use of technical terms, and of critical analysis when required and of reference to texts to support opinion.

### **Shortcomings**

- The majority of pupils lack confidence and purpose when they work independently in pairs and small groups.
- A significant minority of pupils lack confidence when talking in formal situations. They do not always use Standard English.
- A minority of pupils lack confidence in reading aloud.
- A minority of pupils of middle and lower abilities have unsatisfactory higher order reading skills of inference and deduction.
- A significant minority of pupils of lower and middle abilities do not structure writing effectively and fail to correct errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- A significant minority of pupils of lower and middle abilities do not respond to literature critically but rely on a re-telling of events.
- In a minority of cases, written work is not always well presented.

### **Progress since the last inspection**

- Standards at both key stages are slightly improved since the last inspection, though there are still inconsistencies through insufficient sharing of good practice.

### **Mathematics**

Standards are good at both KS3 and KS4. In the KS3 NC tests the number of pupils gaining level 5 and above was good. GCSE results have continued to improve over the years and last year those gaining grades A\* - C was a good percentage result.

#### **Good features**

##### **KS3**

- Pupils understand the four rules of number and can apply them correctly to answer questions. Equally they are able to classify numbers and know the properties of the types of numbers met during the course, as appropriate to their ability.
- Pupils cover various aspects of algebra that reflect the overall school NC scores. They can solve various types of equations and can equally apply formulae to determine solutions or to hypothesise according to their ability.
- The more able pupils are able to transform shapes by a scale factor of a known order and can describe the translations this determines by a column vector.

- The pupils are able to measure lengths and angles accurately and know the names of two-dimensional and three-dimensional shapes and know how to tessellate the former or how to calculate areas or volumes.
- Pupils with SEN are making good progress in mathematics, understand the work covered and have appropriate standards of attainment.
- Pupils can interpret graphs and diagrams and can use the information gleaned to draw conclusions from their observations or to develop the topic further such as in statistical work.

**KS4**

- The most able pupils can carry out complex work in the subject and complete work that is appropriate to higher level GCSE grades.
- Work observed in using and applying mathematics is of a good standard and this work helps in developing and improving standards since it provides ideal challenges to think about topics.
- Pupils can use trigonometrical ratios correctly and can apply the Theorem of Pythagoras according to their ability and they also write the answers to an appropriate degree of accuracy dependent on the information given in the question or problem.
- Pupils overall use a scale accurately and graphs drawn on squared paper are accurate and include the relevant axis as appropriate.
- The less able pupils carry out work appropriate to their understanding and can correctly deal with problems involving symmetry amongst other topics, such that standards are maintained to an expected level.
- Pupils with SEN are making progress in the subject and are following Entry level examination courses, which helps develop their overall attainment.

**Shortcomings****KS3**

- Standards fall when work is not completed or when insufficient work is done on a given topic or in a series of lessons, thus affecting the amount of work evidenced in exercise books. Not all the pupils who miss work through absences copy up the work missed and this means that they have gaps in their understanding and knowledge of the subject.
- A few pupils, generally boys, are over-dependent on others when completing their work or they fail to recollect the work covered earlier, adversely affecting their progress.

**KS4**

- The presentation of work by a number of pupils affects their achievement since numbers are misread and this leads to significant errors in questions.
- Incomplete work is evident at this key stage and this adversely affects standards to a significant extent. The continual absence of some pupils has a negative effect on standards, especially if missed work is not subsequently attempted by the pupils or if it is not copied up.
- Not all lower ability pupils are fully secure with basic mathematics such as the notion of place value and number work generally.

**Progress since the last inspection**

- Standards and examination results have improved at both key stages since the last report.

**Science**

Standards of achievement at KS3 and KS4 are good. Key Stage 3 NC test results have improved steadily in recent years and in 2002 were above the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving level 5 or above was also well above the average for schools of a similar intake. The proportion of pupils achieving GCSE grades A\*-C in recent years, with the exception of 2002, has been similar to the national average and above the local average.

**Good features****KS3 and KS4**

- The majority of pupils within KS3 and KS4 have an appropriate knowledge and understanding of life processes and living things, materials and their properties and physical processes.
- Standards for pupils with SEN in the discrete learning support science classes are very good at both key stages.
- Older, more able pupils have a sound understanding of the demanding material within the syllabus for the higher tier examination.
- Many pupils exhibit good reading, listening, speaking and writing skills that are employed to good effect in most classes to consolidate their understanding of scientific processes and principles.
- They acquire an appropriate scientific vocabulary.
- They are able to abstract key points of information from a variety of secondary sources.
- Pupils make good progress overall in their application of their basic skills in number, data handling, graphical representation and interpretation in a variety of scientific contexts. Units of measurement are usually correctly chosen.
- Pupils are competent in the use of ICT to improve their learning.
- Pupils undertake routine practical work responsibly and with enthusiasm. They handle apparatus confidently, make accurate observations and record them in appropriate ways.
- Pupils progressively acquire the skills of scientific enquiry and overall standards are good in relation to age and ability. With appropriate guidance when necessary, they are able to plan and carry out investigations effectively, considering the relevant key factors involved and ensuring that observations are both valid and reliable. Many make well-reasoned deductions. By the end of KS4, older, more able pupils explain their findings using previously acquired scientific knowledge and produce GCSE course work of good quality.

**Shortcomings**

- In investigative work, many pupils find some difficulty in evaluating their experimental findings and procedures in sufficient depth and in suggesting how the investigation could be further improved or extended.

**Progress since the last inspection**

- Progress since the previous inspection is good in many aspects of the work of the department. However, there are still some inconsistencies due to insufficient promotion and sharing of good practice to support continued improvements in standards.

**Welsh second language**

Standards of achievement at KS3 are good; at KS4 standards in the full GCSE course are good and satisfactory in the short GCSE course.

**Good features****KS3**

- The majority of pupils understand the use of Welsh by teachers and simple passages of audio recordings. Pupils listen well, are attentive and participate actively in both oral and written follow-up tasks.
- Pupils respond correctly to structured oral questions in set situations. The most able give extended oral responses thereby conveying information and expressing an opinion on class topics using a good range of vocabulary pertaining to the topics. These pupils gain confidence in their use of Welsh.
- Average ability pupils overall have a good knowledge of basic sentence structures and in oral tasks respond to questions within a more tightly structured format.
- Pupils of all abilities work well in pair tasks. They interact in an enthusiastic manner and keep within the confines of the set situation when asking one another questions.
- Pupils read passages of Welsh using correct intonation. The pronunciation of the majority is good. Pupils read unseen passages and the more able succeed in conveying the meaning. Reading is a feature in all lessons using course workbooks and on the whole pupils understand the content of reading passages.
- Pupils complete a variety of written tasks and overall standards are good. They display a sound knowledge and understanding of language patterns. The ablest pupils compose passages of extended writing and the content is interesting and the language correct. In the better examples pupils vary the patterns and often the tense of the verb.
- Pupils with SEN remain on task and work well on differentiated work sheets and make progress.

**KS4**

- Pupils studying the full GCSE course make good progress in all language skills. They respond well to challenging tasks in both oral and written work.
- They watch video clips and complete tasks demonstrating full understanding when working in pairs.
- Pupils use a good range of sentence patterns in oral and written work. In their oral work pupils gain confidence in pair work tasks and often when giving whole-class responses.
- The ablest pupils achieve promising standards in their writing work. They write on a wide range of tasks of an extended nature including expressing an opinion on various issues

facing young people. The content is interesting and informative and the expression is correct.

- Pupils studying the short GCSE course respond well to a variety of tasks and overall achieve satisfactory standards commensurate with ability. The more able vary their sentence structures and demonstrate increasing knowledge of vocabulary. The oral responses of the majority are more limited.

### **Shortcomings**

#### **KS3**

- A minority of pupils lacks confidence in giving extended oral responses in particular in non structured situations.
- A small percentage of pupils' vocabulary is limited and in their written work they are less sure of their language patterns.

#### **KS4**

- Pupils in the short GCSE course are more hesitant in oral responses and less confident in their knowledge of language patterns.

### **Progress since last inspection**

- Clear progress has been made in all language skills and in both key stages pupils write passages of an extended personal nature.

### **Design and technology**

Standards are satisfactory at KS3 and KS4. The percentage of pupils gaining A\*-C grades in the GCSE examinations is above the national average in resistant materials and below the national average in systems and control.

At KS3, pupils gain an appropriate range of experiences within the food, resistant materials, systems and control and textiles specialisms. At KS4, they opt for GCSE resistant materials or systems and control.

### **Good features**

#### **KS3 and KS4**

- By the end of KS3, pupils have an understanding of the designing and making processes which are applied, to varying degrees, across the material areas.
- Generally, at both key stages, standards of practical work are satisfactory, with some good and very good examples. Pupils work carefully, respecting health, safety, and hygiene regulations.
- Process and flow charts, star diagrams and Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) are an appropriate and consistent feature of the work in various specialisms.
- At both key stages, pupils use ICT skills confidently and competently to communicate information, to enhance project work and for designing and manufacturing CAD/CAM; the Internet is well used for research purposes.
- Pupils with SEN make good progress in relation to ability, particularly when they are appropriately supported by adults.
- Pupils make appropriate use of technical terminology in the various specialist areas and number skills are constantly used and reinforced.

- During the systems and control course, pupils create procedures, evaluate and produce flow charts satisfactorily as part of the coursework.
- At KS4, in particular, when work is of a good standard, pupils make appropriate use of research information to design and produce original, well-developed ideas. Materials, manufacturing processes, together with quality control checks are clearly identified and recorded.

### **Shortcomings**

- Pupils do not rigorously explore the development of initial and innovative design ideas prior to the identification of the final solution.
- Insufficient attention is given to recording changes made to the original designs and to providing considered reasons.
- Graphical communication skills are not of a consistently good standard, illustrations are frequently unsatisfactory and the use of annotation and colour to enhance drawings are inconsistently applied.
- Insufficient consideration is given to the judicious selection and application of the most relevant information.
- The underachievement of some of the more able pupils is partly due to the lack of appropriately challenging tasks.
- Inadequate attention to appropriate planning and the management of time further affects standards; there are some examples of incomplete work.

### **Progress since the last inspection**

- Since the previous inspection, satisfactory standards have been maintained; there is increased and appropriate use of ICT skills across all material areas. Revised schemes of work include the greater integration of key skills.

### **Information technology**

Standards of achievement at KS3 and KS4 are very good. These very good standards are reflected in the examination results at GCSE which are very good in relation to the ability of the pupils.

#### **Good features**

##### **KS3 and KS4**

- Pupils are confident in their ability to use the hardware systems and a range of software applications to a very good standard.
- They can produce data capture sheets to collect data for database and spreadsheet formats, explore the effects of changing variables and test hypotheses using increasingly complex lines of enquiries to a very good standard.
- Pupils integrate data and information researched and processed using a range of software applications including the Internet to produce final outcomes to a very good quality.
- A significant majority of Y8 pupils are entered for the OCR Key Boarding Skills Examination, gaining a pass or a distinction grade, and in Y9 pupils go on to enter the OCR Initial Text Processing Examination, again gaining pass or distinction grades.

- At KS4, pupils opting for the OCR Text Processing Examination are entered for level 1 in Y10 and move onto level 2 in Year 11, with more able pupils achieving level 3 which is equivalent to AS/A level, while Learning Support pupils enter the OCR Initial Text Processing examination, with a significant number of pupils gaining a distinction grade at each level.
- Pupils opting for the GCSE ICT examination at KS4 demonstrate a very good standard of independent working, completing increasingly complex assignment tasks to meet examination requirements to a very good standard with a significant majority gaining very good examination results.
- At both key stages, pupils demonstrate a very good underpinning knowledge and understanding in all aspects of their written and oral work and they use a very good standard of technical vocabulary.
- In the numerical aspects of their work pupils demonstrate a very good understanding of data handling and confidently use formulae to calculate and process numerical data, which they then present graphically to a very good quality.
- Assignments set are challenging for all ages and abilities and through them pupils show that they can evaluate and explain fully the stages of each task and their choice of software applications to produce very good quality outcomes, meeting the high teacher expectations, which ensure that all pupils achieve to the best of their ability.

#### **Progress since the last inspection**

- The school continues to build on available facilities, resources and teacher expertise to ensure that pupils' standards of achievement are maintained and improved, including the employment of two full-time staff to provide technical support to the now significant range of ICT facilities spread throughout the school for wider curricular use. Standards are now very good.

#### **History**

Standards of achievement at KS3 and KS4 are very good. These very good standards are reflected in the examination results at GCSE, which are very good in relation to pupils' abilities. In 2002, there was a significantly high proportion of top grades with boys performing better than girls. At Entry level, results represent good progress.

#### **Good features**

##### **KS3**

- At KS3, pupils' chronological awareness is securely based. Pupils display a good knowledge and understanding of the events, personalities and developments studied. They are able to apply this understanding in their study, for instance, of the Industrial Revolution.
- Pupils use historical terms appropriately. They are able to make clear links between cause and consequence, change and continuity. They can make comparisons and connections between the main events and developments studied.
- Pupils can provide valid causes for events. By Y9, pupils have a clear understanding of complex causation. They can categorise a variety of causes, clearly recognising the many overlapping issues involved.

- Pupils work confidently with documentary and visual evidence. They can combine evidence from a variety of sources and consider their advantages and limitations as sources of evidence.
- Pupils understand that not all sources are equally reliable and they can apply their historical knowledge to analyse and evaluate interpretations.
- Pupils show a capacity to share ideas, form opinions based on evidence and present their findings knowledgeably.
- Pupils display a good sense of empathy with the motivation and attitudes of people in the past.
- Competence is shown when tackling enquiry based activities and when applying their knowledge to solve historical problems.
- Pupils can present information in a variety of forms. Written work is carefully planned, logically argued and well presented.
- Pupils have a sound knowledge and understanding of the history and culture of Wales.
- Pupils with SEN make good progress at KS3.

#### **KS4**

- At KS4, pupils have a secure knowledge base. Pupils demonstrate the ability to analyse, explain and evaluate key events and issues. This is particularly well illustrated by work on the race issue in America 1929-1990.
- Pupils have a clear understanding of the key historical concepts of causation and change. Year 10's work on the rise of the Nazis in Germany 1919-1945 is a good example.
- By KS4, pupils' approach to historical problems is more analytical. They test sources of evidence for bias, reliability and usefulness and they are able to ask increasingly complex questions of sources.
- Pupils construct very convincing arguments and refer to historical sources to illustrate points and substantiate their judgements. Pupils use their knowledge and understanding to analyse and evaluate how and why historical accounts differ.
- Oral and written work shows growing maturity in the depth of response to questions and in pupils' insights into the motivation and attitudes of people in the past.
- Pupils with SEN make good progress at KS4.

#### **Progress since the last inspection**

- Progress since the last inspection has been good.

#### **Geography**

Standards of achievement at KS3 and KS4 are very good. The standards at KS4 are reflected in the examination results at GCSE which are very good in relation to pupils' abilities.

#### **Good features**

##### **KS3 and KS4**

- Pupils demonstrate a very good grasp of geographical terminology. They are able to apply terms with accuracy and in context.

- Pupils have a very good understanding of the impact and consequences of environmental factors on the activities of mankind. Year 9's study of the San Francisco earthquake in 1989 is a particularly good example.
- Pupils are competent in the use of atlases, statistical data, textbooks, booklets and ICT to enable their acquisition of knowledge, understanding and subject specific skills.
- Pupils' ability to carry out investigations and enquiries, working effectively in groups and presenting their decisions to the class, is very good.
- Pupils' acquisition of key skills in geography is good. Their involvement in extended written exercises, graphical work, mapwork, ICT, investigative and enquiry work makes a significant contribution to the achievement of the high standards. Structured groupwork sessions, observed at both key stages, enhance the pupils' ability to work together, to support each other and to develop their speaking and listening skills in geography.
- Pupils demonstrate a very good knowledge of the location of places which is well illustrated at KS3 in studies involving tropical rainforests in Brazil and at KS4 in the study of multinationals and less economically developed countries (LEDCs).
- Pupils are able to analyse and interpret geographical data of increasing complexity with accuracy. Their presentation of results in a variety of formats is very good.
- Pupils display a very good knowledge of the interrelationship between man and his environment. The study of the operation of multinational companies by Y11 pupils included an investigation of the devastating impact on the environment of cotton growing in the Aral Sea region.
- Pupils' understanding and knowledge of patterns and processes in geography are enhanced by the completion of detailed fieldwork projects. Coursework projects at KS4 carried out on the River Ebbw and the urban study based on the Cardiff Central Business District (CBD) are of a very high standard.

#### **Progress since the last inspection**

- Standards since the last inspection have improved at KS3 and KS4.

#### **Modern foreign languages**

Standards of achievement at KS3 and at KS4 are good in French and very good in German. All pupils study French at KS3 and the most able linguists in Y9 begin German. Both languages are offered at KS4. GCSE results at grades A\*-C in German have been consistently very good and in French have remained consistent, indicating good positive residuals.

#### **Good features**

##### **KS3**

- In German (after only a couple of months) pupils are able to formulate and utter with some fluency a series of short sentences, show progression through NC levels and produce extended writing which demonstrates a good degree of accuracy and conceptual understanding.
- In French a good proportion of pupils can produce extended writing which shows good grammatical awareness.

- Pupils are able in speaking to produce a series of sentences and this is characterized generally by accurate pronunciation.
- Pupils are working at appropriate levels of the NC, in all four attainment targets. The most able pupils attain NC level 7.
- Pupils mostly show confidence in their efforts to use the target language within a rehearsed context.
- Comprehension of reading passages is good and pupils are able to pick out relevant details.

#### **KS4**

- Pupils are able to listen and respond to the target language, write and speak with accuracy.
- More able pupils speak and write with confidence, accuracy and fluency.
- Pupils speak well on topics prepared for GCSE and take part confidently in prepared dialogues.
- A good authentic model of language is provided through effective use of foreign language assistants.
- Pupils show good awareness of grammatical concepts and most have good pronunciation.
- In German, pupils show initiative in using the target language and interact quite naturally with peers and the teacher in the target language.

#### **Shortcomings**

##### **KS3 and KS4**

- Pupils show little initiative in using the target language and limited recycling of language in French. Pupils do not use the target language for normal classroom exchanges and can be hesitant when speaking in unrehearsed situations.
- In some classes, pupils do not practise the target language in pairs and groups.
- Less able pupils in some classes struggle with grammatical concepts.

#### **Progress since last inspection**

- Standards in KS3 and KS4 are now firmly established as good.

#### **Art**

This subject was not inspected because there was no available inspector.

#### **Music**

Standards of achievement are good at KS3. Standards at KS4 are very good. These very good standards are reflected in GCSE results which are above the national expectation.

#### **Good features**

##### **KS3**

- Standards of percussion and keyboard playing are good. In Y7, performances of the 'Miniature March' are good. Y8 performances of 'Dig This' are very well played and Y9 classes achieve polished performances of 'Monday Morning'.

- Generally standards of pitched percussion playing are good, the majority of pupils coping well with playing with two beaters. Drummers and guitarists are well integrated especially in Y9 groups.
- Vocal standards are good. Y7 pupils with special needs sing well in parts in 'The Saints'. In other classes, pupils sing 'Eight Days a Week' and 'Rock the Wall' with enthusiasm and well produced tone and diction. There are examples of very good singing in Y8 and Y9 respectively.
- Standards in composing are good. In Y7, most pupils achieve good standards in Underground Music Raps. In a large number of groups very good attempts are made to refine the dynamics and form of compositions. Year 8 pupils improvise confidently and there are examples of good work produced by KS3 pupils on the department's well-produced web page.
- Overall standards of appraising are good, pupils responding well to a range of opportunities to assess their own work and that of professional musicians.

#### **KS4**

- As in KS3, abler musicians receive very good support from visiting teachers and in lunch-time extension work. Performance standards are very good for ability in vocal and instrumental work. Standards of ensemble singing and wind playing are particularly high.
- Standards of work in composing are good in relation to pupils' abilities with examples of very good work using computers.
- Appraising standards are good for ability.

#### **Shortcomings**

#### **KS3**

- In a very small minority of Y7 lessons, abler musicians are not always fully extended by the range of work in the Underground Music Unit.
- Insufficient numbers of computers within the department and the lack of a recording studio limit the range of composing options.
- A few less able pupils struggle with keyboard fingering.

#### **KS4**

- Despite very good teaching, less experienced musicians encounter difficulties in appraising activity.

#### **Progress since the last inspection**

- Overall, standards of achievement have been maintained at KS3 with improvements in performance skills and appraising work. Standards in KS4 are now very good.

### **Physical education**

Standards at KS3 and at KS4 are good. Examination results at GCSE have recently improved.

#### **Good features**

#### **KS3**

- Pupils show good attitudes, interest and commitment.

- There are a number of very talented individuals in a range of sports.
- Standards of performance in all aspects of the curriculum, of boys and girls and in each of the year groups are good.
- There is a good range of games skills and techniques, control and imagination in gymnastics and good understanding of the effects of exercise on the body.
- Pupils pay careful attention to safety.

**KS4**

- The overall performance of girls is good – both practically and in theory at GCSE where they engage in lively and informed debate.
- The majority of pupils are capable performers with some high achieving individuals.
- Pupils' attitudes are again good; they work with interest and commitment.

**Shortcomings****KS3**

- Pupils do not exercise their planning skills and learn from analysis of others' work in evaluation in all classes.
- Pupils do not devise their own solutions to problems and learn to work independently in all classes.

**KS4**

- There is insufficient quality, breadth and depth of understanding evident in boys' written work at GCSE.
- Pupils do not sufficiently manage and organise their own activity, working independently of the teacher.

**Progress since the last inspection**

- There has been satisfactory progress since the last inspection. There are still inconsistencies in standards through insufficient sharing of good practice.

**Extra-curricular activities**

- Despite the distance to the playing fields, the school provides a good range of extra-curricular competitive activities. There are numerous good and very good performances by individuals and teams at local, regional and national level.

**Religious education**

Standards of achievement at KS3 are very good and at KS4 are good. At KS3 pupils follow the Caerphilly agreed syllabus. At KS4, pupils, for the first time this year, have the choice to opt for short course religious education or short course Welsh. The take up for religious education is good. Those who have not opted for the short course in religious education follow the statutory agreed syllabus. Despite the fact that provision was not made for Y11 to follow the short course, 27 of them have opted to be entered for the examination and are happy to make up missed work in their own time.

**Good features**

**KS3**

- By the end of KS3, pupils have a very good knowledge and understanding of units of work relating to Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Islam.
- They are able to distinguish between the different religions and appreciate that each has distinctive practices and beliefs.
- Their awareness of the diversity of religious practice in Britain is very good.
- Pupils are able to identify religious artefacts and religious symbols and use material gleaned from video clips.
- Oral work is very good with pupils responding well in question and answer sessions and working effectively in pairs and groups.
- They are able to reflect upon what they have heard and seen, engage in empathy exercises and write about their own feelings.
- Pupils are able to relate religious teaching to their own life experiences and discuss moral and social issues.
- They are able to define key technical words and use them appropriately.
- The standard of written work over this key stage is very good.
- Pupils are able to write in a variety of styles; narrative, dialogue, letters, newspaper reports and poetry and very good use is made of writing frames.
- Very good evaluation answers, extended writing and project work are produced.
- A high standard of creativity in the form of posters and other art work is achieved which is regularly used in displays.

**KS4**

- Pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of the units they have covered.
- They are able to relate religious belief and practice to contemporary social and moral issues.
- They are able to undertake research using the Internet and library thereby taking responsibility for their own learning.
- Pupils engage well in active learning lessons.
- Oral work is good; they work well in pairs and groups and are able to present their findings to the rest of the class.
- Written work is good and in many cases very good.
- Pupils are able to evaluate and express their own opinions well; they are able to draw on their own experiences.

**Shortcomings****KS4**

- A small minority of pupils in the statutory lessons do not take their work sufficiently seriously.

## **Religious studies**

Standards of achievement are very good with pupils often performing beyond their ability level. Examination results are above the national average. The numbers selecting Religious Studies at GCSE level have increased in recent years and there are indications that this trend is likely to continue.

### **Good features**

- Pupils have a very good knowledge and understanding of the work they have studied.
- They are interested in the subject and are keen to do well. They know their target grades and are determined to achieve them.
- They respond well to stimuli such as video clips and active learning exercises and are able to take responsibility for their own learning by doing research using the Internet and the library.
- Very good work is achieved in pairs and groups and pupils are able to present their findings to the class.
- Pupils produce very good quality written answers, project work is of a high standard and evaluation answers are well done.

### **Progress since the last inspection**

- Very good progress has been made since the time of the last inspection. The standards of achievement have improved across the key stages in religious education as have the GCSE examination results in religious studies.

## **Personal and social education**

No lessons could be observed during the inspection as lessons were timetabled in the second week of a fortnightly cycle. The quality of PSE is evaluated in section 5.4.

## **Child development**

Standards of achievement are satisfactory overall.

The percentage of pupils gaining grades A\*-C in the GCSE examination is below local and national averages.

### **Good features**

- The available case study reports reveal that the child study has been comprehensively observed and recorded; good ICT skills enhance the presentation.
- Pupils have a satisfactory understanding of the importance of various types of play in the development of language, manipulative skills and the ability to co-operate with others for example.
- Topics such as the physical, social, intellectual and emotional development of a child, family patterns and relevant legislation are further enhanced by group and whole-class discussion, and by child observation.
- Pupils successfully research information and calculate the cost incurred by parenthood.

### **Shortcomings**

- In the least successful examples there is insufficient detail, evaluations are superficial, there is inadequate evidence of personal research and there is some incomplete work.

- A small number of pupils are less confident to complete set tasks independently and are over-dependent on teacher guidance and support.

**Progress since the last inspection**

- This subject was not reported on separately at the last inspection.

## **Drama**

Drama was newly introduced into the curriculum in September 2002, so that pupils have no prior knowledge, skills and understanding. It is already a popular subject which meets the social and cultural needs of a wide range of pupils. The building of specialist accommodation is not yet completed. Drama is currently taught to pupils in Y7 to Y10. Standards of achievement are good at KS3 and satisfactory at KS4.

### **KS3**

#### **Good features**

- Pupils listen attentively and readily respond to the teacher and to one another.
- They have a good understanding of technical terminology, for example, 'tableaux' 'status' and recognise stage directions as well as other conventions of script.
- They collaborate well in pairs and groups, responding to demonstrations, pictures, music and story to produce improvised mime; standards of presentation are good.
- The large majority of pupils adopt and sustain role successfully.
- The majority of pupils have a good awareness of audience.
- Pupils evaluate their own work and that of others to improve presentations.

### **KS4**

#### **Good features**

- The majority of pupils have a good understanding of technical terminology and strategies such as 'role on the wall'.
- Able pupils have a good understanding of dramatic highlights in performance and character development in scripts.
- The majority collaborate well in pairs and small groups to negotiate meaning from pictures and scripts and to plan improvised scenes.
- Able pupils achieve good standards when they use expression, gesture and movement to tell stories through mime. Most sustain character and create mood.

#### **Shortcomings**

- Progress is slowed for a minority who lack confidence in class discussion, group work and performance.

## **Catering**

Standards of achievement are good overall. The 2002 GCSE examination results were higher than the national averages.

#### **Good features**

- Pupils successfully link theory with practical work and develop a good understanding of the requirements of the catering industry.
- Accurate procedures together with specific important points to observe are clearly identified in the preparation 'order of work' sheets.

- Good organisational skills together with knowledge and understanding of correct procedures are evident throughout the practical sessions; outcomes are of a good standard.
- Technical vocabulary is accurately and consistently used during discussions and recorded during written tasks.
- Pupils have good knowledge of nutrition and food commodities and apply these principles when planning menus for a range of clients. Generally, they make well-considered healthy eating choices.
- Pupils benefit from first-hand industrial experience gained during work experience at local catering and residential establishments.
- Understanding of industrial practice, social and interpersonal skills are further developed and enhanced during visits to the catering department at a local College and during school-based catering assignments.
- Information and communications technology skills are successfully used to present work placement projects; overall, experiences are well recorded, and presentations are further enhanced with photographic illustrations.
- Numeracy skills are successfully applied when weighing ingredients, costing dishes and calculating dietary requirements.
- Good hygiene practices are consistently applied during practical sessions, and appropriate protective clothing worn when preparing and serving.
- Pupils address and understand technological development related to the catering industry.

#### **Shortcomings**

- The least successful folders contain less detailed information and evaluations; there is some evidence of incomplete work.

#### **Progress since the last inspection**

- This subject was not reported on separately at the last inspection.

## **8. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

### **8.1 Progress Since the Last Inspection**

#### **1. Continue the stated drive towards raising standards by:**

- **Ensuring that the range and challenge of tasks set for pupils, and the teaching methods employed, enable all pupils to achieve their full potential;**

There has been good progress. Tasks are generally challenging and there is a wide range of teaching methods, including use of the latest technology. Pupils of all abilities generally do well.

- **Implementing more consistent and co-ordinated approaches to the development of pupils' learning skills within subjects and across the curriculum;**

Pupils now have very good attitudes to learning, though planning for the key skills of literacy and numeracy are not co-ordinated across the curriculum.

- **Co-ordinating the implementation of the school's assessment, recording and reporting policy to improve levels of consistency in assessment and marking;**

The assessment, recording and reporting policy has been revised and assessment is generally good. Day-to-day marking is still inconsistent within and between subjects.

- **Establishing strategies to raise the performance of girls at A\*-C in GCSE;**

There has been good progress in that girls' results at GCSE in 2002 were above the national average. Sixty per cent of girls achieved five grades A\*-C compared to 42 per cent in 1996.

- **Improving the effectiveness of liaison between SEN and subject departments;**

In practice, pupils with SEN now achieve well across the curriculum with good use of IEPs by most subject departments and good use of learning support assistants.

- **Monitoring the effect of the use of learning resources on standards.**

Monitoring has developed and learning resources have increased considerably. Standards have also improved significantly.

## 2. Refine the existing SDP with a view to:

- **Defining more fully and clearly the targets set and objectives identified;**

There has been good progress on this issue.

- **Reconsidering the costings associated within the SDP and their implications for the school's finances and budgetary cycle;**

Financial planning has been careful and has enabled the school to increase resources significantly, refurbish, increase the staffing and provide accommodation for drama, priorities of the SDP.

- **Reviewing the nature and quality of the success criteria.**

These are appropriate in the current SDP.

## 3. Review strategies for staff development in order to:

- **Ensure teachers offer pupils a wider range of learning opportunities;**

There has been good progress. Pupils have a wide variety of learning experiences.

- **Extend the expertise of subject teachers within areas of non-specialism;**

There are now few non-specialists and this has no significant impact on standards.

- **Implement consistent approaches to monitoring and evaluation;**

Monitoring and evaluation procedures have been implemented to good effect, though they can be further refined.

- **Build upon existing good practice.**

Whilst there has been sharing of good practice, evident in the improved standards and teaching, there is room for further improvement.

## 4. Meet statutory requirements relating to:

- **The SEN Code of Practice;**

This has been implemented and up-dated.

- **The act of collective worship;**

There has been some progress in that all form tutors have been provided with a resource book this year, but in practice the school does not yet meet statutory requirements.

- **The reporting of religious education to parents of pupils in KS4.**

This has been implemented.

## **8.2 Key Issues for Action**

In order to build on its current success the school should focus on the following issues, nearly all identified in its development plan:

1. Continue to improve standards and examination results, particularly in those subjects where standards are satisfactory as opposed to good.
2. Continue efforts to improve attendance.
3. Plan for the consistent promotion of literacy and numeracy.
4. Ensure that monitoring identifies shortcomings and that good practice is promoted and shared.
5. Plan to extend the accommodation, to provide for the projected increase in the number of staff and pupils.
6. Meet statutory requirements in the areas mentioned in the report and resolve the few health and safety issues reported to the school.

**APPENDIX****A. Basic Information About the School**

Name of School	Newbridge Comprehensive School
School type	Community
Age-range of pupils	11-16
Address of school	Bridge Street Newbridge Newport
Post-Code	NP11 5FR
Telephone Number	01495 243243

Headteacher	Mr Allan Raybould
Date of appointment	September 1991
Chair of Governors	County Borough Councillor Mr D M Gray
Registered Inspector	Miss Glynis Owen
Dates of inspection	24-28 March 2003

**B. School Data and Indicators**

<i>Number of pupils in each year group</i>						
Year group	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Total
Number of pupils	212	155	179	202	173	921

<i>Total number of teachers</i>			
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time equivalent (fte)
Number of teachers	50	3	51.2

<i>Staffing information</i>	
Pupil: teacher (fte) ratio (excluding special classes)	19.1:1
Average teaching group size	24.4
Overall contact ratio	78%

<i>Percentage attendance for three complete terms prior to the inspection</i>						
	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Whole school
Spring 2002	92.0	90.5	88.6	86.3	84.5	88.5
Summer 2002	90.6	90.0	88.2	89.0	94.1	90.1
Autumn 2002	93.5	91.6	90.4	89.9	90.0	91.1

<i>Number of pupils excluded during 12 months prior to inspection.</i>	22 temporary 6 permanent
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### C. Results of National Curriculum Assessments and Public Examinations

National Curriculum Assessment KS3 results: 2002															
Total number of pupils in Y9: 202															
Percentage of pupils at each level															
			D	A	F	W	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	EP
EN	Teacher assessment	School		0.5	1	0	0	1	6.1	25.4	36	16.8	13.2	0	
		National	0	1	1	0	0	3	10	22	34	21	8	0	
	Test	School		2	1.5	0	0	0	9.2	28.4	34	14.2	10.7	0	
		National	0	3	2	-	-	-	9	22	33	19	10	-	
MA	Teacher assessment	School		0.5	1	0	0	1	2.6	8.6	14.7	31	26.4	14.2	
		National	0	1	0	0	0	1	10	23	25	26	13	1	
	Test	School		3.1	2	0	0	0	6.6	21.8	17.8	33.5	15.2	0	
		National	0	6	1	-	-	-	8	22	22	27	13	-	
SC	Teacher assessment	School		0.5	1	0	0	0	0	5.6	22.3	30	24.4	16.2	
		National	0	1	1	0	0	1	10	24	31	23	9	0	
	Test	School		2	1				3	16.7	31.2	29.4	16.7	0	
		National	0	4	1	-	-	-	9	22	29	24	10	-	

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:	63.9	In the school:	51
In Wales:	50.3	In Wales:	50

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

For pupils aged 15, results in GCSE, CoE, GNVQ and NVQ			
Number of pupils aged 15 on the school roll in January 2002: 131			
The percentage of 15 year old pupils who in 2002:			
	School	UA	Wales
were entered for 5 or more GCSEs	82	84	85
achieved 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C	47	43	50
achieved 5 or more GCSE grades A*-G	82	82	85
achieved GCSE grades A*-C in each of mathematics, science, English or Welsh first language)	33	30	37
entered at least one CoE, GCSE short course or GCSE	96	96	97
achieved one or more GCSE grades A*-C	71	66	74
achieved one or more GCSE grades A*-G	91	90	92
achieved no graded GCSE	9	10	8
achieved one or more CoE only	5	4	3
achieved a GNVQ Part 1, a GNVQ at Foundation level or NVQ level 1			
achieved a GNVQ Part 1, a GNVQ at Intermediate level or NVQ level 2			
achieved at least 5 GCSE grades A* to C, the equivalent vocational qualifications or a combination of both	47		
achieved at least 5 GCSE grades A* to G, the equivalent vocational qualifications or a combination of both	82		

**D. The Evidence Base of the Inspection**

- 16 inspectors spent the equivalent of 47.5 days at the school.
- 196 lessons were observed, including full and part sessions, covering all curricular areas except art, where no inspector was available.
- Inspectors attended a sample of assemblies, tutor periods and extra-curricular activities.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headmaster, deputy headteachers, all heads of department and heads of year, staff with whole-school responsibilities and members of the administrative and support staff.
- Work across the curriculum, from representative pupils in Y7-Y11 was examined, together with work in each subject.
- There was formal discussion with a group of pupils from KS3 and KS4 and informal discussion with many other pupils.
- The Registered Inspector met the staff and governing body prior to the inspection.
- Thirteen parents attended the parents' meeting and 48 replies to the questionnaire were received.
- Documentation provided by the school was analysed before and during the inspection.
- Feedback was given to departments and senior management during the week of the inspection and to the senior management team and governors after the inspection.

**E. Composition and Responsibilities of the Inspection Team**

<b>Inspector</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Aspect Responsibilities</b>	<b>Subject Responsibilities</b>
G Owen	Rgl	Context. The main findings of the report. Standards achieved in subjects and areas of learning. Standards achieved in key skills across the curriculum (Communication). Teaching. Quality of self-evaluation and planning for improvement. Leadership and efficiency. School improvement.	modern foreign languages
S Page	Lay	Behaviour and attitudes. Attendance. Partnership with parents and community, schools and other institutions. Partnership with industry.	
L Bithel	Core	Assessment, recording and reporting.	English drama
D Francis	Core	Curriculum. Staffing, accommodation and learning resources.	science
G Owens	Core	Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Support, guidance and pupils' welfare.	religious education religious studies
P Brayshaw	Team	Provision for pupils with SEN.	
P Francis	Team	Standards achieved in key skills across the curriculum (Numeracy).	mathematics
M John	Team		science
G Briwnant-Jones	Team		design and technology catering child development
J Down	Team	Standards achieved in key skills across the curriculum (ICT).	information technology
C Rowlands	Team		Welsh
R Powell	Team		history
H Llewelyn	Team		geography
L Meiring	Team		modern foreign languages
J Jenkins	Team		music
D Makin	Team		physical education

*The visiting inspectors wish to thank the governors, the head and all the staff for the co-operation and courtesy they received during the inspection.*