

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

***PENGLAIS SCHOOL
WAUNFAWR
ABERYSTWYTH
CEREDIGION***

School Number: 667/4047

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***By: Mr B W Medhurst
Registered Inspector***

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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.

LIST OF ACRONYMS IN COMMON USE

A	Advanced
ACCAC	Qualifications Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales
ALIS	Advanced Level Information System
AS	Advanced Subsidiary
CAD/CAM	Computer-Aided Design/Manufacture
CoEA	Certificate of Educational Achievement
EBP	Education Business Partnership
EWO	Education Welfare Officer
GCE	General Certificate of Education
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GNVQ	General National Vocational Qualification
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IEPs	Individual Educational Plans
INSET	In-Service Training
KS	Key Stage
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
MIDYIS	Middle Years Information System
NAfW	National Assembly for Wales
NC	National Curriculum
PS(H)E	Personal and Social (Health) Education
SDP	School Development Plan
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SMT	Senior Management Team
UA	Unitary Authority
Y1-Y13	Year 1 - Year 13
YELLIS	Year 11 Information System

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1. CONTEXT

The school and its priorities

Penglais School is an 11-18 mixed comprehensive school founded in 1973. It is located in a private residential area adjacent to the university campus in Aberystwyth, and serves a wide geographical area extending from Llanon in the south to Machynlleth in the north and inland to the county boundary. There are 1237 pupils on roll, 196 of whom are in the sixth form.

Pupils are drawn from a large number of primary schools and about half of the pupils travel to school from outlying rural districts. The school serves a bilingual community. Around 16 per cent of the pupils speak Welsh as a first language or to an equivalent standard. Welsh is taught and examined as a first and second language.

A sizeable minority of pupils come from primary schools where Welsh is the main medium of instruction. Very few pupils come from minority ethnic heritages. Four pupils receive support teaching in English as an additional language.

The school's catchment includes sizeable groups of both economically advantaged and disadvantaged homes. Twelve per cent of the pupils are registered as being entitled to free school meals, just below the Unitary Authority (UA) average figure of 14.7 per cent.

Its intake represents the full range of ability. There are 50 pupils with statements of special educational needs (SEN) (37 boys; 13 girls). There are an additional 360 pupils on the school's SEN register on Stages 1 to 4 of the SEN Code of Practice.

The school aims to provide pupils with a secure and happy environment, a high quality education and an effective preparation for later life. In the school's comprehensive development plan (SDP) clear objectives are written to achieve these aims. The curriculum is broad and balanced, embracing a suitably large number of both academic and vocational subjects to cater for all pupils' needs.

The school has set itself targets for future success that are challenging but achievable.

2. MAIN FINDINGS

The main findings of the report

Penglais School is a successful school, with many very good features. It provides a supportive environment in which teachers and pupils work together purposefully to achieve high standards.

It is led very well by the headteacher, whose high expectations of success positively influence all concerned with the school. He is supported well by all members of the senior management team (SMT), the teaching and support staff, and the governing body.

Educational standards achieved by the pupils

Since the previous inspection, the school has maintained a steady improvement in its good standards of achievement. The proportion of pupils achieving at level 6 or better in the Key Stage (KS) 3 tests has increased overall, and the percentage of pupils gaining at least five subjects at grades A* to C in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) rose from 48 per cent (above the national average) in 1996 to 68 per cent (well above the national average) in 2001. The corresponding figure for five subjects at grades A* to G increased from 84 per cent to 88 per cent (both above the national average). When the 2001 KS3 results

are compared with those achieved by schools with similar socio-economic backgrounds, they are above the average figure for such establishments in mathematics and science. The school also fares well in similar comparisons for five or more grades A* to C at GCSE.

In 2001, the average points score achieved by students in the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced (A) level examinations was above both the UA and national average figures, indicating good quality results. The percentage of students who achieved two or more grades A to C was above the national average. The percentage of students who achieved two or more A level grades A to E, however, was below the averages for the UA and Wales.

STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS

Subject	KS3	KS4	Sixth Form
English	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good
Mathematics	Good	Good	Very Good
Science	Good	Good	Good
Welsh	Good	Good	Good
Design and technology	Good	Good	Good
Information and communications technology (ICT)	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good
History	Good	Very Good	Very Good
Geography	Good	Very Good	Very Good
Modern foreign languages	Good	Good	Good
Art	Good	Good	Good
Music	Good	Good	Very Good
Physical education	Good	Satisfactory (GCSE – Good)	A level – Good
Religious education	Good	Very Good	Good
Religious studies		Very Good	
Personal and social education	Good	Good	Good
Business studies		Good	Very Good
Drama		Good	
Geology			Very Good
Health and social care			Good
Child development		Good	

STANDARDS IN KEY SKILLS

Skill	KS3	KS4	Sixth form
Listening	Good	Good	Good
Speaking	Good	Good	Very Good
Reading	Good	Good	Good
Writing	Good	Good	Good
Numeracy	Good	Good	Good
ICT	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Working with others	Good	Good	Good
Improving own learning and performance	Good	Good	Good
Problem solving	Good	Good	Good

Good features

- Results at KS3, GCSE and A level in 2001 represent a good improvement since the previous inspection.
- Standards were at least satisfactory in 98 per cent of classes observed and good or very good in 76 per cent. No poor standards were reported.
- Standards in sixth form classes in all subjects are at least good. 74 per cent of classes observed were judged as achieving good standards, with a further 22 per cent as very good.
- Standards observed in most subjects were good throughout KS3 and KS4.
- Pupils with SEN make good progress and achieve well. The provision made for those for whom the National Curriculum (NC) is either disapplied or modified is good.
- The most able pupils are suitably challenged in most subjects and gain very good grades in external examinations.
- Most pupils listen attentively, read well, speak clearly and articulately, write to good effect and work well with their classmates. They use their mathematical skills effectively in other subjects.
- Where good standards are achieved, the significant factors in promoting these standards are the quality of teaching in the subjects, high expectations and the attitudes to learning exhibited by the pupils.

Shortcomings

- A minority of pupils across the ability range fail to fulfil their potential by absenting themselves from school too often and/or for extended periods of time.
- Although pupils use ICT advantageously in a number of subjects, other areas of the curriculum make insufficient use of the technology available to them to raise standards.
- A minority of pupils with below average ability do not achieve their full potential because they experience a limited range teaching and learning strategies.

Quality of education

Good teaching is a major strength of the school. Teachers care about their pupils' welfare and progress, and work hard to maintain high standards. They regularly provide extra help in their own time to support pupils' learning and they provide a very good range of other experiences to extend and broaden their pupils' education.

Good features

- Teaching was at least satisfactory in 98 per cent of classes observed, and good or very good in 75 per cent. These figures compare favourably with the national expectations for 2002: 95 per cent and 50 per cent respectively.
- Teaching in the sixth form was good in 70 per cent of classes and very good in a further 26 per cent.
- In many subjects, all observed teaching was judged to be good or very good.
- Teachers and support staff provide sensitive assistance to enable pupils with SEN to achieve well.

- The KS3, KS4 and the sixth form curricula are good. They offer wide and appropriate ranges of subjects and courses to allow pupils and students of all abilities to have access to meaningful learning experiences.
- There is very good planning for and implementation of arrangements for key skills in the sixth form.
- The arrangements made for personal and social education (PSE), including careers education and guidance, are good throughout the school.
- The modified curriculum for those pupils with SEN makes a very significant impact on their progress and attainment. It caters very well for them.
- There are good arrangements for assessing and recording pupils' achievements and progress in most subjects. The school analyses data very well, and uses it effectively to set targets and to raise standards.
- The school provides good informative reports to parents at regular intervals.

Shortcomings

- The planning for the development of key skills across the curriculum, although satisfactory, is insufficiently consistent across departments to be fully effective across KS3 and KS4.
- In a minority of subjects, a few teachers occasionally fail to adapt the work to suit pupils' needs and prior attainment. They use a limited range of teaching techniques and class organisation.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Good features

- Pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory. Pupils' spiritual awareness is developed well through teaching and learning in a number of subjects across the curriculum.
- Pupils' moral development is good. The school promotes clear values and instils positive attitudes in the majority of its pupils. Most pupils have a clear understanding of right from wrong, understand and abide by the school rules, and show respect for others.
- Pupils' social development is good. Relationships amongst the pupils themselves and between teachers and pupils are predominantly good. Pupils benefit from a very good range of activities in school, in the local community and worldwide.
- Pupils' cultural development is very good. Pupils from different cultures are integrated very well in the school. A very good range of extra-curricular activities extends pupils' moral development.
- Most pupils feel secure, and confident that they can turn to their teachers with any problems.
- Many teachers promote the Welsh language and culture within their subjects. All pupils take a GCSE course in Welsh.
- Charity work is a significant feature of the school's activities.
- Weekly assemblies provide a few opportunities for acts of collective worship and personal reflection.

Shortcomings

- The school does not satisfy its statutory obligation for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.
- A few pupils' misbehaviour shows a lack of respect and concern for members of staff, and other pupils.

Leadership, management and efficiency

The headteacher's leadership is very effective. There is a clear sense of purpose in the school and a strong corporate ethos. Members of the school's SMT share a vision of higher standards, along with other staff in the school. They have sufficient expertise, experience and knowledge of education to enable an efficient and effective management system to operate.

Good features

- The school's systems for self evaluation and planning for improvement are very good. Using detailed analyses of data, the school sets challenging yet realistic targets for future success. Most departments use the range of information provided to very good effect.
- The governors play a very active and supportive role in the school. They are well informed about the school's work and have a very good awareness of the school's strengths and shortcomings.
- The quality of departmental leadership is predominantly good. It is very good in a sizeable minority of subjects.
- The day-to-day administration of the school is very efficient and effective. Support staff in all areas make valuable contributions to the smooth operation of the school.
- The school manages its budget very well. Financial decisions are taken in accordance with the school's educational priorities and objectives, as identified in the SDP.
- Financial planning and control procedures are very effective. The school takes appropriate steps to ensure value for money. The recommendations of the last auditors' report have been implemented.
- Teachers' qualifications and experience match the requirements of the school's curricula. In most subjects, deployment of staff ensures that individual teachers' knowledge and skills are used most effectively to the benefit of students.

Shortcomings

- Aspects of the buildings are unsatisfactory. They impact adversely on students' learning environment, particularly in physical education.

The effectiveness with which the issues identified in the previous report have been addressed

Of the six key points for action that were identified in the previous inspection report, good progress has been made in addressing four of them, satisfactory progress in one and unsatisfactory progress in one.

Good progress:

- The school has increased the range of teaching and learning strategies employed in classrooms. Teachers share good practice to provide pupils with meaningful learning experiences.

- The Welsh ethos has improved and pupils are taught well in Welsh, in line with their prior attainment.
- Work experience, careers education, links with industry and other work-related aspects of education are now good.
- The school now complies with National Assembly for Wales (NAfW) recommendations for the time spent in teaching pupils each week, with generally equitable allowances of time for all subjects.

Satisfactory progress:

- Information and communications technology across the curriculum is now satisfactory. Many subjects use the technology to good effect.

Unsatisfactory progress:

- The school still does not comply with the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

3. EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

3.1 Standards Achieved in Subjects and Areas of Learning

Pupils' standards of achievement on entry to the school represent the full range of ability. They range from well below average to above average, with the proportions of least able and most able pupils being greater than in many other schools.

Standards were at least satisfactory in 98 per cent of the classes observed. They were good in 64 per cent and very good in a further 12 per cent. Standards were highest in the sixth form, where standards were good in 74 per cent of classes and very good in 22 per cent. Those at KS4 were better than those at KS3, being 81 per cent and 62 per cent good or better respectively. These statistics represent a significant improvement on those recorded at the time of the previous inspection. The figure for satisfactory or better standards is similar overall, moving from 97 per cent to 98, but the percentage of good or above standards has increased from around 55 per cent to 76 per cent.

At KS3, standards of achievement are satisfactory in English and ICT. In all other subjects they are good.

At KS4, very good standards are achieved in history, geography, religious studies and religious education. In core-curriculum physical education, standards are satisfactory. In all other subjects standards are good.

In the sixth form, standards are very good in English, mathematics, computing, history, geography, geology, chemistry, biology, music and business studies. Otherwise standards achieved are good.

In the NC tests at the end of KS3 in 2001, 55 per cent of pupils gained at least level 5 in all three core subjects: English, mathematics and science, compared with the all-Wales figure of 50 per cent. Results in science were well above the national average for level 5 or above. Those achieved in mathematics were above average and those in English were average. In all three subjects, the proportion of pupils achieving level 6 or above was above the national average. These outcomes represent an improvement in standards since the previous inspection especially for mathematics and science at the higher levels. When the results are compared with those obtained in schools in Wales having similar socio-economic backgrounds, English is just below average, mathematics just above average, and

performance in science well above average. The performance in science matches that achieved by about the top 20 per cent of similar schools. The 55 per cent of pupils, who achieved level 5 or better in all three core subjects, matches the average for schools with similar intakes.

Examination results at the end of KS4 have improved considerably since the previous inspection. The percentage of pupils gaining five GCSE grades A* to C has risen from 48 per cent in 1996 to 68 per cent in 2001. Over the same period, the figure for five grades A* to G has risen from 84 per cent to 88. The proportion of pupils who achieved grades A* to C success in all three core subjects in 2001 was 47 per cent – well above the national average of 36 per cent, and above the unitary authority score of 44 per cent. When these results are compared with those achieved in similar schools, the success realised by pupils with five or more GCSE grades A* to C places the school within the top fifth of these establishments. Comparing A* to C success in all three core subjects, places the school in the top quarter of similar schools.

At the time of the previous inspection, the students who achieved success in at least two A level or equivalent examinations produced an average points score of 21 – six points above the national average of fifteen. The 2001 results represent a creditable improvement, as the average points score rose to 24 – still six points above the national average of 18.

In virtually all subjects the most able pupils make at least good progress and achieve well. This is particularly so in religious education at KS4, where they complete the GCSE full course in half the recommended time and achieve very good results. In English too, pupils of higher ability perceptively analyse character, language and settings in texts. They also undertake higher order comparisons of two texts. In many A-level subjects, very able students produce exemplary work that demonstrates a depth of understanding of concepts, and application of higher order skills. Such very good work is recognised in the top grades achieved in examinations, as in mathematics for example. A wide range of attributes exemplifies the good standards achieved by able pupils. In music, they give very good performances and undertake imaginative appraisals. Good theoretical and practical work is undertaken in science, and high quality reading comprehension and extended writing occur in modern foreign languages. In Welsh, very good group discussions lead to high standards, and good project work in ICT encourages independent learning.

A few shortcomings are evident in the standards achieved by able pupils. In science, there is a measure of underachievement owing to insufficient challenge in a few aspects of physics at A level. In modern foreign languages, too little use is made of target languages as the normal means of communication. In design and technology, progress is restricted by the quality of the design aspects in pupils' workbooks.

Most pupils of average ability also make good progress and achieve good standards in the majority of subjects. In science, for example, these pupils achieve well because they have a secure understanding of the work, good investigational skills, and they understand and use correct scientific terminology. In modern foreign languages, they speak well on prepared topics and understand what their teachers are saying. However, they tend not to use the foreign language when asking for information. In some history lessons, average pupils occasionally make less progress than they should because they do not remain on task. Nevertheless they still achieve good standards. These pupils achieve well in Welsh, but a small minority of them are disinterested and make insufficient progress.

Lower ability pupils make very good progress and achieve well in religious education. They achieve satisfactory standards in art, geography, English and ICT. Otherwise, they achieve good standards. In religious education, they achieve good results in the GCSE short course.

Standards achieved in science often exceed expectations. These pupils listen well and respond accordingly in Welsh and modern foreign languages. In geography, pupils are not always fully engaged in lessons and this leads to underachievement in aspects of the courses. In English, less able pupils tend to listen ineffectively, lack accuracy in their writing and present their work untidily. Their progress in ICT is hindered at times by high-level language within exercises that restricts them gaining access to the learning experiences.

Pupils with SEN achieve good standards in most subjects. Good provision is made for those pupils for whom the NC is either modified or disappplied. The school places appropriate emphasis upon developing pupils' literacy so that they can access the wider curriculum as they progress through the school. The good learning environment provided by the SEN staff, withdrawal from lessons for extra help with many aspects of learning and the good support provided in mainstream classes, all subscribe well to helping these pupils achieve well.

The difference between girls' and boys' results in GCSE examinations does not reflect the situation nationally, neither is the pattern of differences consistent year on year across the subjects. In class, girls are often more conscientious, better motivated and better organised than boys, and more systematic in their approach to investigative and problem solving exercises.

3.2 Standards Achieved in Key Skills across the Curriculum

Across the curriculum, standards in speaking, listening, reading and writing are good. Pupils' skills in using numeracy and other aspects of mathematics in their other subjects are good. They are good at working with others, improving their own learning and problem solving. Standards in ICT are satisfactory.

The key skills scheme in the sixth form is achieving a very good measure of success.

Listening, speaking, reading and writing

In most lessons pupils are very attentive. The majority of them listen well to teachers' instructions, guidance and questions, and they respond quickly, indicating that they understand fully what is required of them. Most pupils also listen courteously to classmates' contributions to lessons. In music particularly, listening skills are well developed over time, especially when listening to recorded extracts. Pupils listen to and appraise effectively a range of musical styles. In art, pupils listen well when they are interested in what is being said, but activities are often insufficiently challenging and they fail to listen sufficiently well. In English, more able pupils listen well and process information accurately and promptly, but some less able pupils do not listen for detail and they misunderstand instructions. In physical education, a few Year (Y) 11 pupils mainly do not pay sufficient attention in lessons and this hinders their progress.

Nearly all pupils respond enthusiastically to questions and the more able in particular are articulate when replying, giving good reasons for their answers, explaining techniques used in their work and justifying their opinions. Because teachers emphasise correct use of technical and specialist language in lessons, most pupils use the terminology associated with subjects such as mathematics, design and technology, geography and science. Less able pupils, though, occasionally have limited vocabulary and lack precision when trying to explain their thoughts. They also tend to favour brief responses and on occasions, such as in art, they answer flippantly without much forethought. Pupils often give presentations to their classmates or contribute at length to discussions. They usually do so confidently, as in business studies. In English, most able pupils have a good command of the language, but a few pupils across the ability range are self-conscious when speaking to more than one other person, or they fail to change the register of their speech to suit a variety of audiences. In the

sixth form, students are articulate when responding to questions, expressing opinions and challenging other students' hypotheses.

In English, most pupils read well with understanding, coping admirably with a broad range of texts with good skills of comprehension. In many subjects, pupils are required to read aloud and they do so confidently and fluently. In business studies, most students can interpret and summarise information provided in texts and other documents, but not all students read all the required texts. Pupils in science classes read instructions and information well. Less able pupils cope well with appropriately adapted texts in this subject.

In many subjects, pupils' writing skills are developed well through tasks that require them to write for a wide range of purposes and audiences. Throughout the curriculum, their work is usually organised and presented well. Most pupils write coherently, fluently and accurately. The most able pupils produce extended pieces of writing, responding well to a range of stimuli, using a range of appropriate styles, whilst less able pupils communicate meaning well in shorter pieces of writing. In science too, pupils often write good accounts of their investigations, the quality and quantity of detail varying according to ability. Across the ability range, however, pupils make occasional grammatical and spelling errors that reduce the quality of their writing.

Numeracy

Pupils develop good skills of numeracy in their mathematics lessons. They benefit from the time devoted to teaching numeracy and from practice of mental mathematical skills.

Standards in numeracy across the curriculum are good overall. Many subjects use mathematics within their programmes of study, for example when using formulae in spreadsheets in ICT, presenting statistical data in geography or business studies, handling shapes and measuring in art, dimensions and calculations in design and technology and using a wide range of mathematical applications in science.

The variety of pupils' mathematical experiences throughout the school has been recorded and analysed. This has led to the production of a useful document that describes recommended techniques and strategies for a wide range of numerical applications. In this way, pupils experience a measure of consistency of terminology and practice across the curriculum.

Information and communications technology

Standards of achievement in ICT across the curriculum are satisfactory in all key stages.

In design and technology at KS3 and KS4 pupils use ICT for computer-aided design/manufacture (CAD/CAM), research and presentation to a good standard. At KS4 geography and business, ICT is used well for a range of appropriate applications including word processing, spreadsheets, databases and research using the Internet. In music, good standards in composing are enhanced by layering, storing and refining. In most other subjects satisfactory standards are achieved in a wide range of applications including the use of the Internet, but experiences vary from class to class. Standards of achievement are unsatisfactory in religious education. Very good use is made in the Dyslexia Centre to enhance standards, but overall the use of ICT for lower ability pupils and those with SEN is satisfactory.

In the sixth form, students make good progress in developing and applying a wide range of skills and applications in English, design and technology, geography, art, music and business. In other subjects they are satisfactory. All students in the lower sixth not following an information technology or computing course study ICT as a key skill, and standards are good. Students in the sixth have exclusive access to a small suite of computers and make good use of them.

Across the school, planning for the use of ICT is good other than in General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) health and social care.

Working with others

Pupils' ability to work with others is good. In many classes, they are given opportunities to work with classmates. For example, composing and performing in music, engaging in group discussions or preparing presentations in many subjects, pair and small-group work in scientific practical sessions and group research in business studies. Pupils respond well on these occasions. They often co-operate well with each other, listening to classmates' comments and offering constructive criticism where appropriate. Such co-operation is a major feature of physical education lessons.

Creative skills

Students' creative skills are good. Good examples occur across the curriculum. For example, in music pupils compose imaginatively, in religious education they design and produce celebration cards, and in physical education they create dance sequences. Creativity is a strength of the art department. In history, pupils have written creatively to produce good World War I diaries. In design and technology, many pupils produce original designs for their work and their drawings reflect good developmental steps.

Problem solving skills

Pupils' problem solving skills are good. Competent examples occur in music when pupils are composing and performing. History provides opportunities for pupils to evaluate evidence and these occasions make a significant contribution to improving problem-solving skills. Individual research projects undertaken by Y9 pupils in this subject are very good. In design and technology, pupils often solve problems that emerge when preparing design briefs. Design and make activities require pupils to consider alternatives, make decisions, and modify plans and ideas.

Improving own learning and performance

In many subjects and in review sessions, pupils are involved at regular intervals in reviewing their achievement and progress. Through a variety of strategies, including good feedback on performance and self-assessment sheets, pupils make valid decisions about the next steps to take in their own learning.

Key skills in the sixth form

Through a very good, well-planned programme, sixth form students are provided with opportunities to produce a key skills portfolio. The system is managed very well and students benefit from all that the school provides to support them. Specialist advice is always available. Teachers assess and moderate students' work. Information and communications technology and mathematics specialists teach timetabled lessons to Y12 students to help them reach required standards. In addition, 15 subject areas provide opportunities for students to learn and practise key skills. They also design appropriate assignments to allow students to achieve at the highest level. Tutors provide good ongoing assistance for students and a calendar for the collection of evidence is published so that students are well informed about how and when they will be able to complete tasks for accreditation. Students complete meaningful individual action plans for their portfolios.

Overall standards in the key skills in the sixth form are good.

4. ETHOS OF THE SCHOOL

4.1 Pupils' Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development

Pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory. Their moral and social development is good and their cultural development is very good. The school is an orderly and happy community.

Pupils' spiritual awareness is developed through work in religious education, the Christian Union and collective worship. A number of NC subjects, such as art, music and English, also contribute to the spiritual dimension. A weekly assembly with an appropriate theme is arranged for every year. The assemblies are orderly and include suitable presentations by pupils supported by members of senior staff. The acoustics in the hall make it difficult to hear at the back and the marking of the registers during the assembly undermines the solemnity of the occasion. In some of the assemblies observed, the spiritual element was not strong and there was no opportunity for pupils to reflect. On the days when pupils do not attend an assembly, in many classes there is no collective worship, contrary to the statutory requirements. Overall, assemblies make a satisfactory contribution to pupils' spiritual development. Across the curriculum, there is no purposeful planning to ensure pupils' spiritual development.

Moral issues are raised regularly in collective worship, in personal, social and health education (PSHE), religious education and other subjects of the NC such as English, Welsh, history and geography. Pupils learn about issues to do with prejudice, honesty, choice and responsibility. Environmental issues are frequently discussed in geography and science lessons. Pupils are encouraged to support the school's recycling schemes and the vast majority of pupils respect the school building and its surrounding areas. Respect for others is not always apparent on the school's corridors. Pupils can express an opinion on moral issues in the vast majority of lessons. They have positive attitudes towards other people, tolerance and an understanding of the difference between right and wrong. Through their support for a great number of local and national charities, pupils display a sense of responsibility towards others. This work is effectively co-ordinated by the sixth form community service group.

Pupils' social awareness is developed through a very good number of activities in the school, in the local community and worldwide. Pupils participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities within music, games and outdoor activities. They mix well socially and collaborate across the age range. Pupils from different cultures are very well integrated. The recently formed School Council provides very good opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and contribute to the social life of the school. Sixth form students respond well to many opportunities to exercise responsibility. For example, they provide their younger counterparts with good support through their anti-bullying support group. Across a wide range of activities, pupils take pride in representing the school at local, national and international level.

A very good range of extra-curricular activities extends pupils' personal, social and cultural development. These include visits to theatres, art galleries, museums, religious places and concerts, both locally and further afield. Pupils' European and international awareness is developed through specific aspects of the curriculum, such as history and art educational trips to Paris and New York. There are also a substantial number of national, European and worldwide trips that enable pupils to appreciate and understand life in many other cultures. Awareness of Wales and its culture in the subjects of the curriculum has been developed well since the last inspection. Displays around the school record pupils' participation in school life and celebrate their achievements.

4.2 Behaviour and Attitudes

The behaviour and attitudes of pupils are good overall.

Most pupils are polite and friendly to staff and visitors, and relate well to each other.

A minority of pupils, however, flout the school and classroom codes of conduct. The misbehaviour of these pupils can be disruptive and affect adversely their own progress and that of other pupils in the class.

Throughout the school, the majority of pupils' attitudes to learning and behaviour in class are good. Pupils show interest in their studies and concentrate well in lessons where the tasks are appropriately challenging and teachers' expectations of behaviour and achievement are high.

There are clear discipline referral procedures, which are carried out promptly and consistently. They reinforce the emphasis placed by the school on orderliness, courtesy, mutual respect and responsible attitudes.

The merit system in the lower school is popular with the pupils and rewards effort, achievement and good behaviour effectively. Home-school agreement procedures reinforce the school's code of conduct, which is geared to all school activities.

The school has in place a well-structured pastoral care programme based on wide-ranging and systematic strategies on behaviour management. Liaison with other agencies is very productive.

The pastoral care team works efficiently and with commitment to support all pupils, but especially those who are at risk of exclusion from school.

In the year before the inspection there were 40 short-term exclusions and no permanent exclusions. Exclusions from school are efficiently managed in accordance with clearly established procedures.

Parents and pupils report that if there is bullying the school acts quickly and very effectively. No incidents were observed during the inspection.

Racism or other forms of discrimination are thoroughly discussed in many areas of the curriculum, for example religious education, history, English and PSHE.

Detailed and clear pupils' records are kept.

4.3 Attendance

The school places a high priority on attendance and consistently achieves satisfactory rates of attendance. Whole-school rates, including the sixth form, average 91 per cent for the past three terms. Since the last inspection the school has worked diligently to improve attendance rates for pupils of compulsory school age and has been successful in raising attendance, particularly for Y11 pupils. Attendance rates for the sixth form fall below satisfactory standards. This is partly due to a minority of pupils who have poor rates of attendance and to the school correctly applying the statutory requirement to record study leave as an authorised absence. The school has set an appropriate target of 93 per cent for pupils of compulsory school age and is working rigorously to achieve this.

A small number of pupils in all year groups have high levels of persistent absence that is having an adverse impact on the continuity of their education and the standards they achieve. The school makes every effort to minimise the disruption caused by absence and teachers support pupils in completing work missed when they return to school. Staff work diligently to develop positive attitudes in pupils towards attending school regularly, and parents are reminded frequently of the need for regular and punctual attendance of their children. Good and improving attendance is celebrated and rewarded throughout the school, and many pupils have exemplary records of attendance.

The assistant headteacher with responsibility for attendance, together with the heads of year, monitor attendance rigorously. Follow up procedures, including contacting parents on the first day of absence, are consistently applied. The pastoral administrative officer provides very good support to staff in the monitoring of attendance. Good use is made of an efficient computerised registration system that provides staff with comprehensive attendance information and enables them to identify patterns of absence for particular pupils. Very good liaison takes place with the Education Welfare Officer (EWO). This contributes to the successful monitoring of attendance and to the development of further strategies to improve attendance rates. Every effort is made to counsel and support pupils whose attendance is giving cause for concern and good working relationships exist with other external welfare agencies.

Registration is conducted efficiently and in accordance with statutory requirements but morning registration is sometimes hampered by the late arrival of school buses. Subject teachers register pupils at the start of lessons to minimise internal truancy and frequent 'spot checks' are made to ensure pupils have not left the premises during the school day. This registration system is highly efficient and has improved punctuality, especially at the start of the afternoon session.

The school has made considerable efforts to implement the NAFW circular 3/99 *Pupil Support and Social Inclusion*. Working closely with relevant external agencies, the school has initiated a number of alternative strategies for dealing with disaffection and irregular attendance. Schemes such as the Youth Access Initiative are having a positive impact on attendance rates, and hence achievement, for individual pupils.

5. QUALITY OF EDUCATION

5.1 Teaching

Good teaching is a major strength of the school. Its positive impact on pupils' learning is an important contributory factor to the good standards achieved by the majority of pupils.

The quality of teaching was at least satisfactory in 98 per cent of classes observed, and good or very good in 75 per cent. These figures compare very favourably with the national targets for 2002 where 95 per cent and 50 per cent are expected respectively. The quality was highest overall in the sixth form where it was good in 70 per cent of classes and very good in 26 per cent. At KS4, 61 per cent of the teaching was graded as good with 18 per cent very good, and at KS3 the corresponding figures were 53 per cent and seven per cent. These figures represent a considerable improvement since the previous inspection when teaching was judged to be at least satisfactory in 94 per cent of classes and good or better in 62 per cent.

Teaching is very good in music and religious education at KS4, and in geography, geology, computing and mathematics in the sixth form. This high quality teaching is reflected in the motivation of the pupils and students, and the calibre of external examination results achieved. Teachers communicate their high expectations to pupils, encouraging them to become independent in their research, assessing their progress regularly and involving the pupils in the process so that they too are responsibly critical of their own work. Thus very good standards are achieved at a fast rate.

In all other subjects good teaching predominates, although some slight variation between key stages and within departments was evident during the inspection. Unsatisfactory teaching was observed in a very small number of lessons in only a few subjects.

Teachers are well qualified, and they have good knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach. This secure base of knowledge, along with up-to-date expertise, enables them to prepare suitably challenging work for their pupils. Often teachers' enthusiasm for their chosen subjects motivates and encourages pupils to enjoy their learning. Relationships between most teachers and pupils are very good, allowing learning to occur in a relaxed but well-structured atmosphere. Expectations of good behaviour are made clear to pupils and most respond well. In the sixth form, students are regarded as young adults and treated accordingly. They appreciate this and most of them respond maturely.

Teachers organise and manage their classes well and use a good range of teaching methods and strategies that are successful in maintaining pupils' interest in their work and in encouraging them to make good progress. In many lessons a good pace of progress is maintained and teachers use well-designed questions to probe pupils' understanding and to encourage them to think about their answers before responding, thus extending their understanding. On many occasions, teachers share learning objectives with pupils and spend time at the end of lessons reviewing what progress has been made. These practices have a positive impact upon pupils' learning. In many subjects, such as science, teachers prepare good materials for learning and support, in addition to published texts and other items. In this way they cater for the needs of all pupils. A strong feature of teaching is the way in which teachers prepare pupils for external examinations, teaching examination techniques as well as subject knowledge effectively.

In a range of subjects, a proportion of the teaching, though containing several good features, has a few shortcomings. In religious education, for example, there are occasions when inattentive pupils are not dealt with promptly and this results in a lack of progress. In a few aspects of science, Welsh and modern foreign languages, pupils are sometimes not given sufficient opportunities to think for themselves; teachers dominate lessons and speak for too long. In a few subjects, including some art lessons, the match of the work to the needs and ability of the pupils is not always effective. Across the curriculum, instances occur where mainly below average pupils are challenged ineffectively in lessons because teachers do not involve them well enough, and they make insufficient progress.

Teachers help pupils consolidate and extend their learning by setting homework of appropriate challenge and interest. Not all pupils co-operate fully. The homework often and appropriately, includes work to develop pupils' creative and investigative skills. In many subjects, teachers help pupils to make progress through the use of good constructive marking that shows pupils how to improve. There are, however, instances of unsatisfactory homework being set and non-informative marking occurring across a minority subjects.

Teachers have a good knowledge of pupils with SEN and they provide good teaching, care and support for these youngsters. They use individual and group education plans effectively to provide appropriately challenging work. Learning support staff also provide good care for pupils with statements of SEN, and others, and help them to achieve well.

Many teachers give generously of their time outside lessons to help individual pupils and to offer extra-curricular activities that broaden and extend pupils' learning.

5.2 Assessment, Recording and Reporting

Overall arrangements for assessment, recording and reporting pupils' achievements are good.

There is a detailed whole-school policy based on sound principles that in the main is reflected in departmental policies. It provides useful guidance and allocates responsibility for key aspects of practice to subject departments, form tutors, and senior staff.

Assessment of pupils' work takes place on a regular basis in all subjects, using a variety of appropriate methods. Homework, classwork and tests are usually marked according to the school's guidelines but there is some inconsistency of practice within and between departments. Where comments are provided they are occasionally too general and not sufficiently helpful in assisting pupils to improve their work.

Assessments are usually accurate and closely linked to NC and examination board requirements. Resource issues, however, hinder accurate assessment of individual pupils' attainment within ICT at KS3. In mathematics, science, religious education and music, for example, regular and thorough moderation of samples of pupils' work is undertaken using agreed criteria to ensure validity. Pupils' involvement in evaluating their own progress is also a good feature in science, design technology, art and music. Teachers keep accurate records of pupils' progress. Collated assessment information from departments in conjunction with data from other sources forms the basis of individual pupil reviews with form tutors. Academic progress is discussed and appropriate future action agreed and recorded centrally and in the pupil's planner. Subject teachers, form tutors and senior staff monitor further progress.

The school's database is comprehensive. There are detailed analyses of data on pupils' entry to school, results of KS3 NC tests, external examination results and other assessments such as Middle Years Information System (MIDYIS), Y11 Information System (YELLIS), and Advanced Level Information System (ALIS). This information is used in several ways: to identify children with special needs, to identify underachievement, to set appropriate targets for academic improvement and to compare actual performance in tests and examinations with the targets.

In subjects such as mathematics, science and modern foreign languages, analyses of pupils' performance in NC tests and examinations lead to appropriate changes in programmes of work, to support learning and improve standards.

The attainment of pupils is a major item for discussion during annual departmental reviews with senior staff and future action for improvements, where appropriate, is reflected in targets and departmental development plans.

All parents receive one full written report each year informing them of their child's personal and academic progress. The full reports have an extended written comment by both form tutor and head of year as well as a page for each subject that reflects the nature of the course followed, and its particular assessment components. When internal test and examination marks are given, the average for the ability group is also given. In many instances written comments by the subject teacher highlight strengths and weaknesses, and suggest ways in which the pupil could make further progress. However, some comments are often more general in nature rather than subject specific and thus are not as helpful. Pupils are also required to complete a self-review that is useful in helping them reflect on their achievements and focus on future action required to improve their work. For most year groups apart from Y13, Y11 and Y9, reports are provided towards the end of the academic year. Reports for Y11 and Y13 are issued prior to parents' consultation meetings before external examinations are taken. Reports to Y9 parents are issued mid-year before option choices are made for KS4. Further information is provided later in the year when KS3 NC test results in the core subjects are known. Interim reports are provided in individual cases where pupils are not making sufficient progress and are giving cause for concern. There are effective arrangements for all parents to discuss their child's progress in annual meetings with subject teachers.

5.3 Curriculum

The school has appropriate curricular aims and objectives. These are reflected in curriculum provision that is carefully planned to ensure continuity and progression in pupils' learning.

Pupils at KS3 follow a broad and balanced curriculum that includes all subjects of the NC, religious education and PSHE. All pupils in Y7-Y9 have a timetabled lesson of information technology each fortnight. French or German is offered as a modern foreign language. Spanish is offered as an additional modern language from Y8 for the most able pupils.

Some effective setting of teaching groups occurs in Y7 based on information from the associated primary schools. Pupils who need extra support in their academic work are placed in two small teaching groups. Setting across the year group occurs in mathematics and Welsh; all other subjects are taught in mixed ability groups. From Y8 onwards subject departments decide their own groupings; some maintaining mixed ability whilst others choose setting according to pupils' progress. These arrangements provide most pupils with opportunities to learn at rates well matched to their abilities and prior attainment.

All pupils at KS4 study an appropriate common core of Welsh, English, mathematics, double science, physical education, religious education and PSHE.

Choice from four option blocks covering an appropriate range of mainly technological and commercial subjects, humanities, languages and creative subjects provides pupils with a balanced curriculum meeting NC requirements whilst catering for most pupils' individual interests. A few pupils are moved between sets at appropriate times according to their progress within individual subjects. Uptake of modern foreign languages and design and technology is well above national averages. Most courses offered lead to GCSE but some subjects are also offered at Certificate of Educational Achievement (CoEA) level for a small minority of less able pupils. The need to improve the range of courses to include more vocational provision is recognised in the SDP and a few additional courses are on offer for the next academic year.

Schemes of work in most subjects indicate thorough planning for coverage of the NC programmes of study, and continuity and progression across KS3–KS4. Planning for the development of key skills across the curriculum is not totally effective.

Personal, social and health education at KS3 and KS4 is provided through suspension of the normal timetable for one lesson in rotation each fortnight. This arrangement allows pupils to achieve good standards.

Good careers education and guidance, and one week's work experience for all Y10 and Y12 students are delivered as part of the PSHE programme. Sex education is taught as an integral part of the curriculum with major contributions from science, religious education and via qualified members of the pastoral team.

Appropriate arrangements are made to cater for the individual needs of a small minority of pupils for whom the NC is temporarily disapplied or modified. The alternative curriculum provided for these pupils is good.

The open-access sixth form provides a good range of courses at A and Advanced Subsidiary (AS) levels. Most courses attract viable numbers and the option arrangements allow the vast majority of pupils to follow courses of their choice. Additional subjects are planned for next academic year. A good programme for key skills development that has been devised within the school is also offered. Support ICT lessons are provided for all pupils not following examination courses in this aspect.

In Y12 about four-fifths of the student population follow four AS level courses. A small number of pupils follow a GNVQ Intermediate course. Most pupils in Y13 study three A2 level subjects. General studies is no longer offered due to time constraints. All students are offered the opportunity to take physical education and although currently there is no timetabled provision for all students, it will be made available next academic year.

The timetable is organised as 50 one-hour periods a fortnight, thereby meeting the recommended total teaching time of 25 hours per week. Distribution of lessons throughout the fortnight is somewhat uneven as a consequence of staffing difficulties right up to the end of last summer term. In Y7-Y11 the timetabling of four groups simultaneously within each year group for physical education in conjunction with inadequacies in the facilities available causes problems in obtaining consistency and progression in the work.

The school has a well-considered policy on homework. In the majority of subjects, homework suitably complements work done in class. Most pupils make good use of their planners to record the homework set in lessons.

The school provides numerous extra-curricular activities open to all pupils who wish to participate. These make a positive contribution to pupils' overall development. Musical and physical education activities are particularly well supported. Visits, field trips and links with outside agencies contribute positively to their education.

A school committee, with representation from senior management and all subject areas, meets regularly to review curricular, assessment and other closely related issues.

With the exception of a daily act of collective worship, the governing body appropriately fulfils its statutory duties. It is well informed and actively involved in decisions relating to broad changes in the curriculum.

5.4 Support, Guidance and Pupils' Welfare

Provision for the welfare and guidance of pupils is good. Pupils and parents consider the school to be a very supportive and caring community.

The school provides effective personal guidance for its pupils through a systematic pastoral care structure sensitively and efficiently managed by the heads of year and form tutors and well led by the head of pastoral care.

Staff know their pupils and their needs well. Relationships between teachers and pupils and between the pupils themselves are positive. Constructive feedback to pupils signals that teachers value the effort pupils make.

The detailed pastoral support plans are used to support inclusion for all pupils where practicable. A wide range of alternative educational packages make a valuable contribution in catering for the needs of pupils who are in danger of being excluded from school.

The EWO and the School Counsellor in liaison with parents, or carers, and the school, contribute effectively to the support for pupils.

Pupils and parents report that the few identified incidents of bullying are dealt with promptly and effectively.

Pupils' views are heard and listened to through the forum of elected form representatives who meet regularly both with the governing body and as a School Council.

The PSHE programme is clearly structured. Lessons occur once per fortnightly cycle and a block of time is allocated to PSHE topics each half term.

The school's policy on Child Protection is clearly understood and implemented by all staff.

In most subjects pupils know the level at which they are working and what they need to do to improve. Academic tutors, heads of departments and heads of year monitor individuals' progress regularly. The well co-ordinated assessment, recording and reporting system makes a valuable contribution to the quality of academic guidance.

Most pupils, including those with SEN, are well integrated in the life the school and make steady progress. There is close pastoral liaison with the partner primary schools so that staff are aware of the needs of all Y7 pupils when they enter school. This feature is consolidated throughout the school as both form tutors and heads of year remain with the pupils until the end of KS4.

Teachers are conscientious in the extra guidance they give their pupils, in particular in mentoring and with catch-up workshops in preparation for examinations.

Outside agencies provide positive support to the school in its comprehensive range of support and activities.

High priority is given, through PHSE, to careers education. There is a well-planned and age-specific programme of careers-guidance for pupils in Y9 to Y13. Liaison with outside careers agencies is close and effective. In 2000, the school won a Quality Award for Careers and Guidance.

Pupils, including sixth form students, are very positive about the work experience and the work-related curriculum offered to them. Placements are carefully selected and closely linked to pupils' and students' careers aspirations.

In the sixth form, well-structured guidance is given on higher and further education. Students are secure in the advice they receive.

Health and safety regulations are in place and carried out correctly, including full risk-assessments, the recording of accidents and fire safety precautions. The school has a nurse and many staff are trained in first aid.

A few issues concerning health and safety were reported to the headteacher during the inspection.

5.5 Provision for Pupils with SEN

The provision for pupils with SEN is very good and the implementation of the Code of Practice is good. Pupils are very well integrated into the life of the school and have full access to the NC and, where relevant, to other accredited courses.

The school's provision is varied and includes teaching small groups across the subjects of the NC and religious education, withdrawal to the Dyslexia or Literacy Support Centres for extra help and learning support assistants (LSAs) for individual and small groups in mainstream classes. The Learning Support Centre provides a secure base for 10 pupils with a wide range of special needs.

In the Learning Support Centre pupils are making good progress and within their ability are achieving well. All pupils follow an appropriate individual educational programme. However, there is no overall audit of pupils' individual educational and social needs to ensure a balanced approach across the curriculum. Where appropriate they are integrated successfully in mainstream classes. The LSAs provide the pupils with good support ensuring that the integration is successful. During the school day the Learning Support Centre provides a good focus and security for the pupils.

The Dyslexia Centre provides very good support for pupils with literacy difficulties. The provision ensures access with relevant support to curricular entitlement and progress in individual literacy skills. Pupils are developing a good range of writing forms, adapting their style to suit the audience and purpose of their writing. They are developing a secure grasp of

basic syntax, together with grammar and spelling skills that enhance their writing. Good progress is made by all the pupils in gaining the relevant reading and spelling skills, and most are on the way to becoming fluent readers. Very good use is made of ICT to support and enhance pupils' learning.

In the small classes, pupils with SEN make good progress in the subjects of the NC. Suitable opportunities are in place for pupils to be transferred to mainstream classes and all have access to CoEA or GCSE examinations. In the vast majority of the small classes, lessons are well planned, suitable teaching strategies are employed and good use made of the support of the LSA and the information provided by the SEN co-ordinator (SENCO).

A large team of LSAs offers good support to small groups and individual pupils in the Learning Support Centre and in mainstream classes. When the support is effective they provide continuity and security to less confident pupils, often helping to avoid difficulties and help teachers to meet pupils' educational and emotional needs. In a minority of lessons they are not well deployed, and are not sufficiently used in the lessons. The pupils' statements of SEN indicating one-to-one support for individuals necessitate their being used for one pupil only.

Subject teachers are responsible for providing suitable work for pupils with SEN within their curriculum area. There is a good informal link between the named SEN teacher in each department and the special needs teachers. Meetings are held to discuss and share relevant information. In addition the SENCO distributes relevant information including group and individual educational plans (IEPs). A good number of mainstream lessons reflect this information in their lesson planning.

Fifty pupils have statements of SEN. Nine pupils' statements include a disapplication from a subject of the NC and 24 pupils have had their curriculum appropriately modified to meet their SEN. Four hundred and ten pupils are included on the SEN register. This is higher than the national average. The arrangements for identifying pupils in need of assistance are good, and the SEN register is reviewed effectively. Statements of SEN are reviewed effectively; the vast majority of parents attend the meetings and make valuable contributions. The UA and external agencies are consulted and where relevant are involved in the meetings. All pupils have an appropriate group education plan or IEP. They include relevant targets and strategies, and are shared with the parents and departments.

The co-ordinator provides very good guidance and has a clear vision for future development, and on implementing the new Code of Practice. She is well supported in the work by the specialist staff and the designated SEN teachers in the departments. The SMT and the designated governor are supportive of the work and ensure equal opportunities of access wherever possible for all pupils with SEN. Since the last inspection support for pupils with SEN in mainstream has been substantially increased and the expertise within departments has been enhanced.

5.6 Partnership with Parents and Community, Schools and Other Institutions

The school places particular importance on its partnership with parents, primary schools and the local community and enjoys good relationships in all these areas. The school's initial teacher training partnership with the University of Wales, Aberystwyth is very good and is a strength of the school.

Communication with parents is well established and effective. Parents are kept well informed by a comprehensive prospectus and annual report of the governing body. Regular and informative newsletters provide parents with extensive information about the life and work of

the school as well as celebrating pupils' achievements. Parents have the opportunity to meet with teachers annually to discuss their children's work and progress and these meetings are generally well attended. The school has developed a useful home/school agreement that has been issued to all parents and a sizeable number of parents have signed and returned the agreement. Parents value the ready access they have to the headteacher and senior staff when required.

The school's active Parent Teacher Association makes a valuable contribution to the life and work of the school. The association organises many social and fund raising events which enhance links with the local community and provide the school with a valuable source of additional income. Funds raised are used purposefully to enhance learning resources and enrich the school's external environment.

The school has developed good pastoral and administrative links with its many associated primary schools. Arrangements for the transfer of pupils are very good. Most pupils approach secondary school with confidence, feel welcomed and settle in well. Their pastoral care is carefully monitored, and form tutors and the head of year offer very good support to pupils, especially during their first weeks in the school. The school recognises that the improvement of curricular links is an area for development and is working diligently to achieve this. At present, although some curricular links are evident, for example in science, they are insufficiently developed to influence the curriculum planned for KS3. Links with institutes of further and higher education are well established. Older pupils and students have the opportunity to attend open days and further education forums, which they find beneficial.

The school enjoys a very good partnership with the University of Wales, Aberystwyth and student teachers regularly undertake placements at the school. A highly effective monitoring and mentoring programme is in place, which has a number of outstanding features. Students readily involve themselves in the life and work of the school and make a positive contribution to subject departments.

The school enjoys an effective partnership with the local community and pupils regularly support a number of community initiatives, especially through The Community Services Group administered by sixth form students. Fund raising for local and national charities is a highly successful feature of school life. Many subject departments make good use of the locality as a learning resource; educational visits and the expertise of members of the local community enhance curricular provision for pupils and successfully contribute to the standards achieved.

5.7 Partnership with Industry

The school is developing a good partnership with industry and receives valuable support from a wide variety of local businesses and agencies in its efforts to raise the economic and industrial awareness of pupils, and to prepare them for the world of work. There are effective policies in place for careers education and work experience but no written policy has been developed for industry links and there is no co-ordinator to ensure a whole-school perspective on partnership with industry. A number of subject departments have forged successful links with industry, commerce and business in the locality. The effective links developed, particularly in science and business studies make a positive contribution to the quality of provision and enhance considerably pupils' motivation and standards of achievement.

The school shows a high commitment to careers and the work related curriculum and considerable improvements have been made since the last inspection. The co-ordinator for careers education has made an outstanding contribution to the high profile now given to

careers and work related education within the school. The success of the school's programme is reflected in the achievement of *The Award for Quality Provision in Careers Education and Guidance*. Many sixth form pupils speak highly of the programme of careers guidance and the support they receive in preparing their applications for higher education.

The school enjoys productive partnerships with the Careers Company Wales and with the Education Business Partnership (EBP) who work closely with the school to provide a well-planned programme of events to enhance pupils' industrial understanding and give them insight into employment. Events such as the sixth form Euro Conference and participation in the Young Enterprise Scheme are well supported by local employers and give pupils valuable insight into work and into industrial and economic decision making. The school takes part in a number of competitions and projects sponsored by the EBP and local employers, and has won recognition for its achievements in enterprise activities. The flourishing links that the school enjoys with its partner schools throughout Europe give pupils valuable insight into life and work in contrasting European countries.

Work experience, undertaken in Y10 and in the sixth form is organised with the help of EBP who undertake the administration of the programme and carry out the health and safety inspections. Valuable support is also received from parents and pupils who are encouraged to seek relevant placements themselves. Work experience is monitored by school staff and suitably followed up in PSHE. Placements for students in the sixth form are particularly beneficial when care is taken to provide work experience directly linked to pupils' career aspirations. Many pupils and students view their placements as good preparation for employment.

Few teachers have undertaken relevant industrial placements in recent years but the school is actively considering placements that will enrich curricular provision for pupils and benefit staff development.

Overall, curricular provision, pupils' motivation and learning have been enhanced considerably by the school's commitment to careers education and the work related curriculum.

6. MANAGEMENT

6.1 Quality of Self-Evaluation and Planning for Improvement

The quality of self-evaluation and planning for improvement is very good across the school as a whole and in most departments.

The school has clearly defined very good procedures for evaluating its performance and planning for improvement. A culture of self-evaluation is clearly evident within the school. The duly rigorous application of the school's measures in most subjects has enabled it to make good progress since the previous inspection in a number of important areas, including the quality of teaching and learning, and the consequent standards achieved by pupils. The school is not complacent about its success.

One major area of development since the previous inspection is the emphasis placed upon meaningful analyses and use of a wealth of data about pupils' performances. The use made by the school of these analyses has been recognised nationally as an important step forward in reviewing progress and setting targets for pupils and schools.

Pupils' attainment is reviewed regularly through analyses of public examination results, comparative data and value added data, along with comparison with national data.

Comparisons are also made between the core subjects at all levels. Analysis of results by teaching group and gender differences also inform the school's decisions.

The school introduced its revised self-evaluation procedures in September 2000. They have proven to be effective in moving the school forwards. The procedures include both academic and pastoral aspects of the school. They require good channels of communication and accountability. These are achieved through the school's successful line management structure. Each senior member of staff has a management responsibility for a number of departments and/or pastoral groups. These senior staff have a number of responsibilities within this evaluation structure. They include monitoring the process of departmental self-evaluation, helping to formulate the departmental development plan and undertaking performance reviews. In addition to this, the headteacher monitors the work of at least three departments each year, spending about one week in each. He provides feedback to each member of the department following these visits. To ensure that a full picture is obtained, he also interviews pupils at regular intervals and reviews their written work. Other senior staff have responsibility for other aspects of school life such as homework, assessment, attendance, sanctions and rewards, performance management and SEN. Thus all aspects of the school are evaluated rigorously and effectively.

Heads of department are charged with analysis and evaluation of information as it applies to their subjects, along with planning to meet the needs of all pupils. Departmental self-evaluation is firmly established and positively influences departmental and school development planning. Aspects include monitoring of teaching, lesson observations, sharing good practice, ensuring professional development is pertinent to the school's needs and setting targets for future success. Very good practice occurs in the science and modern foreign languages departments. Systems are detailed, perceptive and constructive leading to realistic but challenging targets for improvement.

Heads of year undertake similar worthwhile evaluations within the pastoral curriculum. They monitor the work of form tutors, oversee the use of baseline data and evaluate attendance, referrals and exclusions.

Consequent to the above practices, the SDP and its targets are appropriate for improving the quality of education further. Departmental planning is linked very closely to the school's main priorities for improvement.

Governors are well informed, actively involved and very supportive. They regularly review the school's performance and have a very good awareness of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

6.2 Leadership and Efficiency

The school has a clear vision and sense of direction. All concerned work hard to provide for all pupils' and students' academic and personal development in a challenging and supportive atmosphere. The school encourages most pupils and students to have good attitudes towards their work, to behave well, to take part in a very good range of extra-curricular activities and to have confidence in themselves.

The headteacher provides very good leadership and this has been a major factor in maintaining the high standards achieved at the school. He has a thorough understanding of the strengths and shortcomings of the school and he has very clear ideas of how the school can continue to improve the quality of education it provides. He receives very good support from the other senior staff, who join with him to form an active and effective school management team. A good team spirit exists within this organisation and throughout the school. There are clearly defined management roles for all senior staff and individuals'

strengths are used to best effect in running the school. The school is an orderly community. Staff are aware of the school's policies and organisational systems, and regular staff briefings are effective in maintaining good channels of communication.

Governors carry out their duties effectively and efficiently. They have valuable individual expertise, which they use to the school's advantage. They are involved in all aspects of planning, monitoring and evaluating the school's performance, especially through the work of a range of appropriate committees. Consequently they are fully aware of the school's strengths and shortcomings, and the strategies to be employed for improvement, as seen within the very good SDP. They are supportive in all areas of the school's life and work. The annual report of governors to parents is detailed and thorough.

The quality of departmental leadership and management is good overall. It is very good in music, science and geography. In science, for example, delegation of responsibilities is very good, monitoring of standards, teaching and learning is effective, good use is made of assessment data to inform curricular planning and financial management is very good. In most departments, many of these good qualities of leadership and management are to be found. Often there is very good liaison between teachers in departments, and a willingness to share good practice with a view to raising pupils' standards of achievement further. Planning for progress and continuity within the curriculum is good in most departments.

Nevertheless, there are a few shortcomings. For instance, in art, resources are not managed well, in modern foreign languages there is an overemphasis on preparing pupils for examinations and in ICT arrangements made for the subject at KS3 are not fully effective.

All staff look for ways to raise standards, they set achievable but challenging targets to maintain progress and they use resources effectively. Appropriately there is a strong emphasis upon professional development, so that pupils can receive the best teaching to help them improve.

Financial planning and management are very good. Governors and senior staff work well together to achieve this. The school handles its income of around £3.5 million prudently and efficiently. The budget is set by correct reference to the planned curriculum and the consequent staffing, accommodation and learning resource requirements. The governing body also exercises careful oversight of the school's finances, staffing provision and appointments. Daily management of finances is very efficient, and spending decisions are taken only after proper consideration of the school's agreed priorities for development, and then the personnel concerned take particular care to ensure that best value for money is obtained. The latest auditors' report received by the school contained a few recommendations. The school responded positively to these. The school maintains a sensible surplus year on year as a contingency fund for unexpected costs.

Staffing costs per pupil are just above the national average, the school's pupil to teacher ratio is better than average and its average class size is greater than the national average. Expenditure per pupil on books and equipment is above the national figure. Capitation is awarded to departments by an equitable formulaic system, and in most cases the allowances are adequate or better, enabling subjects to provide well for their pupils.

Day-to-day organisation and administration are very efficient and effective. Support staff in all areas make a positive and valuable contribution to the smooth running of the school.

The school meets statutory requirements relating to pupils' entitlement to subjects in the curriculum. It follows the guidelines of the NAFW circulars and takes due note of advice received from ACCAC (Qualifications Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales).

6.3 Staffing, Accommodation and Learning Resources

Staffing

The provision of teaching and support staff is sufficient to meet the school's needs and is of good quality. There are 70 full-time teachers, including the headteacher, and 15 part-time teachers. This results in a pupil to teacher ratio of 16.2:1, which is better than the Wales average of 16.5:1.

Teachers are well qualified, with a good distribution of experienced teachers and those newer to the profession. A lower than average proportion of the staff has industrial experience. Staff are deployed effectively to cover the curricular and pastoral roles identified in their job descriptions. The teachers' class contact ratio of 70 per cent compares favourably with schools of this size. The staffing structure is appropriate to the school's needs with 76 per cent of the staff having equitably allocated incentive allowances for extra responsibilities. The school leadership group effectively combines experience and expertise.

The non-teaching staff, both clerical and technical, provide effective support across a wide range of duties and responsibilities. They are very helpful and make a valuable contribution to the smooth running of the school.

A deputy headteacher who consults a staff development committee and staff across the school effectively manages the in-service training (INSET) provision. All teaching staff engage in an annual formal professional review and the school has prepared a draft policy for performance management and review. Training is prioritised according to the requirements of the SDP, departmental development plans, and individual and career needs, and is informed by effective monitoring of teaching and of the standards of pupils' work in all subjects. Its usefulness is evaluated by staff who share expertise. In-service training is seen as an important facet in the development of teachers. The development of in-class support, clerical and technical staff is a current school priority. Teachers maintain a personal continuing professional development file. Newly qualified teachers are closely supported through a well-planned programme of observation, review and INSET, both in the school and as part of the UA programme. Teachers new to the school receive a well-planned induction programme, which quickly integrates them into school life. There is some teaching outside specialisms. Where it takes place, it has little detrimental effect on standards other than in physical education and business, where there is insufficient guidance and training. The school has good and effectively managed links with initial teacher training establishments and a well-planned teaching practice programme that is appropriately monitored and supported.

Accommodation

The main school comprises the buildings of a secondary modern opened in 1952 that was extended in 1973 when it became comprehensive. The school is built on a pleasant compact site with a number of grassed areas including a large quadrangle which houses picnic tables for pupils' use in the spring and summer. There are several outbuildings and demountable classrooms the condition of which ranges from good to poor. Currently the numbers attending the school are near those of the official accommodation level; consequently the school is full and some new building is planned. Most classrooms are on the small side and corridors are narrow, resulting in congestion at times.

In terms of the curriculum, since the last inspection new technology facilities have been built and science laboratories have been renovated. Modern foreign languages classes have been housed in a new outside building but physical education facilities remains unsatisfactory. The gymnasium has insufficient storage for apparatus, resulting in a safety hazard. Changing facilities are unsatisfactory. The sports hall roof leaks, badly restricting its safe use at times when it would be most useful, and there is poor drainage of the four multi-purpose pitches.

As a consequence of a 'full' school, indoor sports facilities are used for assemblies and examinations, which adversely affects teaching. Facilities in the library are good but its size is limiting further development. Most departments are suited or partially suited but there is a shortage of storage room in several departments despite many 'self-help' alterations. The sixth form has good social accommodation and access to discrete information technology facilities but there is insufficient easy access to quiet study areas as the library is often timetabled. The learning environment of classrooms varies widely within and between departments. Some classrooms are visually attractive with good displays of pupils' work while others are dull and drab.

The inside of the school is kept very clean and main school toilet facilities are satisfactory but toilet and changing facilities for pupils with SEN fall far below expected standards. Wheelchair access to many parts of the school is impossible without help. Pupils generally look after their school and there is little graffiti but some pupils drop litter – a problem the school is tackling but has not yet solved. A rolling programme of carpeting and painting just keeps up with the needs of the school. The site manager and his team are particularly effective. They alter, decorate and maintain the fabric of the school in a continuous planned programme that ameliorates many of the shortcomings of the site.

Resources

The school spends an average proportion of its budget on teaching and learning materials. Departmental resources for learning are generally good. There are, however, some shortages of quality tuned percussion instruments in music and of data logging equipment in science. The use of resources for learning is good in all subjects other than in art where both management and use is unsatisfactory. An equitable system for distributing departmental allowances is in place along with the opportunity to bid for additional funding.

Library resources are below the recommendation of 13 books per pupil. The quality and range of non-fiction texts are good but there are insufficient books for reading for pleasure. Careers resources are good. A full-time librarian effectively manages the use of the library and its development into a learning resource centre but this is restricted by the space available. Departments are making increasing use of the library and pupils are to be seen using it at all times of the day.

Information and communications technology resources are good. The school computer to pupil ratio is 1:6 and improving. Pupils have access to computers in the information technology suites, in some departments and in the library at lunchtimes and after school. Good use is made of this opportunity. There are insufficient computers in the ICT suites for pupils to work individually, particularly at KS3, which adversely affects their standards. Most departments have their own computers or have good access to the ICT suites.

7. SUBJECTS AND AREAS OF LEARNING

Standards achieved by pupils

English

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

Good features

KS3

- Achievement in public examinations is in line with the national average.

- Pupils generally speak with confidence in small groups and in class discussions. They respond positively to role-play and ‘hot-seating’. Many pose relevant and searching questions.
- The majority of pupils listen carefully and have good recall of what they have heard.
- Pupils appraise others’ efforts sensibly, often with good subject knowledge.
- They are developing good comprehension skills in relation to their abilities. Many are acquiring confidence in the interpretation of texts, especially poetry, from the beginning of Y7.
- Pupils respond positively to more demanding and wide-ranging texts and materials. They predict intelligently using their imagination and previous knowledge. Many pupils judge character astutely, identify the nature and function of the setting and have a good grasp of events in the studied texts.
- A number of pupils, across the ability range, produce lively, imaginative written work including scripts, brochures, letters, posters and reports in order to amuse, persuade and inform. All pupils are confident in their writing and many produce impressive extended pieces and are beginning to use the drafting process usefully.
- Key Stage 3 pupils are acquiring good understanding of poetry, and write it well.

KS4

- Achievement in public examinations is better than the national average.
- Pupils at KS4 build strongly on skills developed at KS3 in speaking and listening, reading and writing.
- Most pupils are articulate and confident when addressing their peers. They listen carefully and respond promptly and accurately. They have a broad vocabulary which they use appropriately. Pupils with SEN produce oral work on Macbeth which illustrates both good understanding and an intelligent and amusing interpretation.
- They show perceptiveness and sensitivity to characterisation as in “An Inspector Calls” and “Of Mice and Men”. Many draft their work, in terms of content and accuracy, in good detail. In their work on poetry and language analysis they show intelligent understanding of writers’ techniques and their effects.
- Much of their writing demonstrates sincere and original personal responses, a burgeoning individual style and an ability to write for a wide range of audiences.

Sixth form

- Achievement in public examinations is better than the national average.
- Students demonstrate a sophisticated and mature approach to literature.
- Their analysis of the texts indicates a depth of understanding that is often matched by their articulate justification of their views both orally and in their written work.
- The majority of students produce carefully considered and perceptive work.

Shortcomings

KS3

- There is a sizeable number of pupils who do not speak at length or develop an argument. They do not naturally or easily change registers so that their language is more appropriate for the designated listener or situation.
- In too many cases the quality of pupils' work is tainted by spelling and punctuation errors and untidy presentation.
- A sizeable minority of less able pupils have undeveloped listening skills – their work is limited because of their short attention span. This too often affects the pace and standards of the lesson, especially in role-play and other oral work.
- Pupils' writing of discursive pieces is neither sufficiently rigorous nor measured.

KS4

- Much interesting writing at GCSE is marred by careless grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- The standard of boys' work, although better than the national average, lags behind that of the girls.

Since the last inspection resources have improved in number and quality. At KS3, timetabled use of the library has extended the reading range offered to pupils. The acquisition of a number of plays has led to improvement in the writing of dialogue. At KS4, the less able are improving their higher order reading skills by being exposed to more challenging writing. Better planning in ICT means that its use is more consistent and pertinent. Basic writing errors remains a shortcoming but some progress is being made as a result of standardise marking and better departmental moderation of NC tests and GCSE work.

Mathematics

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

Good features

KS3

- Results in the 2001 KS3 national tests at level 5 or above were above the national average.
- Pupils make good progress from Y7 to Y9. This can be seen clearly in the good quality work in their exercise books. Most work is well organised and complete. Many pupils have a good work ethic.
- Pupils with SEN make good progress and achieve good standards.
- Pupils' basic numerical skills are good. Their mental mathematical skills are well developed during regular practice sessions.
- In most classes, pupils can explain clearly what they are doing, and show that they understand the mathematical concepts involved.
- They often ask questions to confirm understanding and suggest alternative methods of solution, using correct terminology.
- Nearly all pupils make appropriate and accurate use of electronic calculators.
- They make good use of approximation techniques.
- Many pupils recall and apply a wide range of previous work, not just the most recent.
- In geometry, pupils know the names and properties of many shapes and solids. They draw and measure accurately in most classes.

KS4

- In 2001, the GCSE results for grades A* to C and A* to G were good. They were above national averages. Such achievement represents good progress through the key stage.
- Less able pupils and those with SEN often work logically and methodically, thinking well about what they are doing, not just guessing answers.
- As at KS3, most pupils use calculators well and appropriately.

- Many pupils provide extended reasoned answers to questions that indicate a good depth of understanding of the topics involved.
- In many instances, pupils work systematically and methodically when undertaking investigational work. More able pupils cope well with rigorous, very demanding tasks.
- In many classes, pupils challenge their teachers with demanding questions to confirm their understanding of topics.

Sixth form

- Results at A level are usually very good, with many students achieving the highest grades.
- Students recall a good range of previous work and they use it well in new and more demanding situations.
- Nearly all students have a very good work ethic. They organise themselves and their work effectively.
- Most have a secure understanding of algebraic techniques and they use them well in a range of topics, such as when dealing with Newton's Laws of Motion.
- Students often ask very searching questions to extend their knowledge and understanding.
- They often spot 'short-cuts' in working before teachers ask what they might be.
- They occasionally challenge teachers and classmates in lively discussions – thus extending the range and scope of the curriculum.

Shortcomings

KS3

- A few less able pupils sometimes find basic number facts and properties difficult to remember. They also use calculators inappropriately.
- A minority of pupils lack confidence in their own ability. This leads to a measure underachievement because they constantly refer to teachers for guidance, rather than thinking about what they are doing.
- On occasions, pupils' misbehaviour and idle chat hinder progress for a few of them.
- A few pupils work without understanding, repeating learned procedures without knowing what's happening mathematically.

KS4

- A few pupils who are over-confident in their own ability are insecure with aspects of algebra.
- Pupils sometimes rely inappropriately on calculators for simple arithmetic operations.
- Misbehaviour and idle chat hinder progress for a few pupils.
- A minority of mainly less able pupils confuse mathematical terms such as mean, median and mode.

Sixth form

- One or two students still rely too heavily upon their teachers for guidance; they show little initiative in their learning.

Since the previous inspection, good progress has been made. Standards of achievement have improved, as has the quality of teaching. Information and communications technology is used more effectively, but its use overall is still underdeveloped.

Science

Standards of achievement at KS3, KS4 and in the sixth form are good.

Good features

KS3 and KS4

- Key Stage 3 NC test results in 2001 were very good. The proportion of pupils achieving level 5 or above was well above the national average. The proportion achieving level 6 and above was also well above the all-Wales average.
- At the end of KS4 the great majority of pupils are entered for the GCSE double award science examination. In 2001, 72.6 per cent of those entered achieved grades A*-C, well above the all-Wales average of 53.5 per cent.
- Overall standards achieved in most classes are good reflecting sound teaching and thorough coverage of the programmes of study. No significant differences in girls' and boys' achievements are evident.
- Standards for pupils with SEN are generally good at both key stages.
- A strong emphasis on the development of pupils' basic skills in the teaching programmes contributes significantly to their knowledge and scientific understanding of life processes and living things, materials and their properties, and physical processes. Standards in these aspects are appropriate across the age and ability range.
- By the end of KS4 more able pupils have developed a sound understanding of more demanding material in the syllabus for the higher tier examination.
- Throughout both key stages, most pupils listen effectively and express themselves clearly during routine question and answer sessions. Constructive discussion allows them to consolidate their understanding of scientific ideas and concepts. They acquire a well-developed science vocabulary.
- Pupils experience a variety of written tasks matched to their abilities. Many are able to apply their knowledge well and to provide clear explanations of scientific phenomena using appropriate terminology.
- Pupils make good progress overall in the use of their basic skills in number and handling data in a scientific context. Likewise, graphical representation and interpretation skills are appropriately developed.
- A good range of practical work is undertaken and pupils progressively acquire the essential skills of scientific enquiry. They learn to plan and carry out investigations effectively, make accurate observations, record them in a variety of ways as appropriate, draw valid conclusions and suggest improvements in their experimental procedures. Overall standards are good in relation to ability and by the end of KS4 many more able pupils produce GCSE coursework of high quality.

Sixth form

- In 2001, results at A level in biology, chemistry and geology were very good; a high proportion of pupils gaining A and B grades; mean grades being significantly above the

averages for Wales. Results in physics were a little disappointing with the mean grade just below that for Wales.

- Standards in classes are usually good with some very good work evident in many instances.
- Students acquire a good level of knowledge and understanding in most topics and many respond well to searching questions both orally and through extended writing using sound scientific thinking in their explanations. Good examples of independent research work are evident.
- Laboratory-based practical work in all subjects is of a high standard. Students are able to measure accurately and reliably, and gather relevant evidence and record it in appropriate ways. Analysis and interpretation of data, and evaluation of experimental procedures in terms of reliability and accuracy are soundly based.
- Fieldwork in geology also is of a very high quality.

Shortcomings

KS3 and KS4

- Pupils' understanding of the work in a few lessons is limited by the narrow range of teaching approaches used and by insufficiently probing questioning of pupils to generate productive discussion.
- A minority of pupils' presentation of work is unsatisfactory. Despite regular monitoring of a sample of pupils' books, there are a few instances of incomplete or missing work.

Sixth form

- Occasionally a few aspects of the work in physics in the sixth form are treated in insufficient depth to challenge students appropriately at this level or to enable them to acquire a secure understanding of the principles involved.

Progress since the previous inspection is good. Weaknesses identified then have been addressed positively. Links with primary schools have improved on several fronts including the production and successful trialling of curricular materials with Y6 pupils in a few of the larger primary schools. Greater emphasis has been placed on basic skills, problem solving and the impact of science and technology in society within teaching programmes. Key Stage 3 NC test and GCSE examination results have continued to improve steadily.

Welsh

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

Good features

KS3

- Pupils across the ability range are able to offer extended contributions to whole-class question and answer sessions.
- The majority of pupils are able to discuss at length a range of topics in group work sessions. In one lesson, pupils discussed their own lifestyle in comparison with that of child workers in Indonesia and then summarised their opinions at the end of lesson plenary session.
- The majority of pupils use their proficiency in their oral skills to enhance their work in reading and writing tasks.

- Pupils follow an independent reading programme which contributes to the raising of standards. In one observed lesson pupils read a book, wrote a brief review which was read by peers, culminating in a vote to decide which book sounded the best read. In another lesson pupils of low ability underwent a timed reading exercise which raised the standard of their reading aloud.
- Pupils are able to compose extended written work in a wide range of registers. Pupils of middle and lower ability groups make good use of writing frames as aids to extended writing.
- Many pupils take advantage of the wide range of extra-curricular activities offered by the department which help to raise standards.

KS4

- Seventy-seven per cent of pupils attained grades A*-C in the 2001 GCSE examinations, which is significantly higher than the national average.
- Listening skills across the ability range are good with pupils responding well to video and audio based exercises. In one lesson, pupils in a high ability set discussed characters viewed on film and took advantage of effective prompts and feedback by the teacher to raise the standard of their oral work.
- Pupils of high and middle abilities cope well with a wide variety of reading tasks and good examples of reading aloud were observed in low ability classes.
- Pupils compose written work in a variety of registers and it is evident that they take advantage of their proficiency in their oral and reading skills to enhance their written work. Pupils taking advantage of positive feedback offered by the teaching staff also improves standards.
- Many pupils take advantage of the wide range of extra-curricular activities offered by the department, which helps to raise standards.

Sixth form

- Students are able to discuss at length a wide range of topics and use their comprehensive vocabulary to good effect.
- Set reading books are enjoyed and literary forms are discussed thoroughly and with confidence.
- Good standards of written work are maintained with the students able to draft and re-draft their work to good effect.
- It is noteworthy that the number of A level candidates has risen dramatically in the last two years.

Shortcomings

KS3 and KS4

- Pupils of low and middle ability are not given enough opportunities to practise new language patterns thoroughly, which, in turn, limits pupils' oral contributions.
- Some lessons are teacher-centred for much of their duration, which limits the opportunities for pupils to engage in practising language items and oral communication tasks.

- A significant minority of pupils are capable of following the GCSE Welsh first language course; the fact that they do not represents underachievement.

Progress since the last inspection has been good. A significant minority of pupils follow Welsh first language courses at KS3 which reinforces fluency attained in the primary sector. Pupils follow an independent reading programme and there is more emphasis on the drafting and re-drafting of written work which help to raise standards.

Design and technology

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

Good features

KS3

- Pupils' understanding of a design process is good and its application in project work is satisfactory.
- Research skills are good.
- In most modules pupils generate ideas well.
- Formal drawing and graphic communication skills are good.
- Pupils show a good knowledge and understanding of materials, components and processes that they use in their designing and making.
- Making skills using an appropriate range of materials are good and sometimes very good. Pupils work accurately and produce a good finish to their products.
- Mechanical and electronic control principles are understood, and appropriately embedded in design and make assignments.
- Computer control flow diagram sequencing is well developed and understood, and applications are at a developmental stage.
- Structures work is creative.
- Effective use is made of focused tasks to enhance designing and making.
- There are good applications of ICT for CAD/CAM (computer-aided design and manufacture).
- Less able pupils make good progress through modified tasks.

KS4

- GCSE examination results in 2001 were near but below national averages for grades A*-C in resistant materials and well above for graphic products, food and textiles technology. The performance of most pupils was at least in line with that of their other subjects.
- Design work is good overall with effective use of a design process to guide designing techniques.
- Design specifications are mostly well constructed following good research.
- Presentation skills are good overall and sometimes very good.
- Making skills are good. Pupils work accurately and produce a good finish to their products. Project work is often innovative.

- Understanding of materials, their properties and working characteristics is good. Pupils have a sound understanding of manufacturing techniques and mass production.
- The use of ICT for research and presentation is good and its use for CAD/CAM is developing.

Sixth form

- At A level, examination results for the small group entered were below national averages for grades A–C, but in line with their performance in other subjects.

A level Product Design

- Design work is good. Students research, analyse and produce effective design specifications to guide their product development.
- Students' evaluation of the products they design and make is good.
- Project folios display good standards of idea generation and presentation.
- Effective use is made of ICT for research, presentation and, where appropriate, CAD/CAM.
- Project work is innovative and consistently well made.
- Case studies, which are firmly linked with commercial and industrial contexts, are well structured and presented well.
- Students' theoretical work displays a sound and developing understanding of materials, their properties and the applications of design and technology in society.
- Standards in the lower sixth are very good.

Shortcomings

KS3

- Design specifications and quick creative design drawing skills are underdeveloped.
- The link between design specifications and evaluation is not well established in pupils' work.
- Electronic activities are insufficiently challenging.
- Calculations of load failure are not a part of the structures module.

KS4

- Quick creative design drawing skills are underdeveloped.

Sixth form

- Quick creative design drawing skills are weaker than other elements of students' designing.

Since the previous inspection, standards at KS3 and KS4 have improved from satisfactory to good and a successful product design A level course has been introduced.

CoEA graphical and material studies

In this KS4 course, standards are good. No pupils were entered for this course previously.

Good features

- Pupils have a sound practical understanding of making processes in metals and timbers.
- Project work is made accurately and has a good finish.
- Pupils have a good working knowledge of tools, equipment and processes.

Shortcomings

- Variable attendance affects the progress of some pupils.

Information and communications technology

Standards of achievement at KS3 are satisfactory. At KS4 they are good. Standards of achievement in computing in the sixth form are very good.

Good features

KS3

- Pupils manage computers effectively. They confidently conduct fundamental computer operations such as logging on, calling up and saving their work, and accessing appropriate applications and the Internet.
- Skills of communicating information are good. Pupils can often confidently combine text and graphics in appropriate combinations according to the demands of their own design requirements. Design work is often of a good standard and is incorporated into a range of communicating applications.
- Data handling and modelling using spreadsheets and databases are satisfactory. Pupils' understanding of their composition and function varies across and within groups.
- Good standards are achieved by most pupils in screen-based control, though not a requirement of the NC programmes of study.
- More able pupils are challenged and make good progress.

KS4

- In 2001, results at grades A*-C were above national averages.
- Pupils develop a comprehensive range of information technology skills in the coursework component of the GCSE course. They confidently communicate and handle information for a variety of purposes and audiences.
- Project work often demonstrates a sound understanding of research, analysis, problem solving and evaluation.
- Pupils present their work well and are able to explain clearly why they have chosen specific information technology applications.
- Pupils have a good understanding of theory.
- Pupils of all abilities respond positively to teacher guidance in the improvement of their project and course work.

Sixth form

- In 2001, at A level, examination results for grades A–C were above national averages and most students' results demonstrated positive progress.
- Students have a good understanding of theory.

- Project work is often innovative and displays evidence of effective investigation, research, analysis and implementation.
- Problem solving skills are very good.
- Students confidently use advanced database construction coupled with imaginative presentation techniques.
- They successfully evaluate and test their computing solutions to problems which are embedded in real industrial and commercial contexts.

Shortcomings

KS3

- Group sizes require pupils to work in pairs, leading to reduced hands-on information technology experiences.
- In some pairs there is inactivity on the part of one member, resulting in limited progress.
- Pupils insufficiently consider social, economic, ethical and moral issues related to the use of ICT.
- There are insufficient modified tasks for less able pupils and those with SEN.

KS4

- Most pupils' project work is not embedded in real life contexts, which reduces opportunities for research, testing and evaluation.

Sixth form

- There are no significant shortcomings.

Standards at KS3 and KS4 are similar to those achieved at the time of the previous inspection. In the sixth form they have improved from satisfactory to very good.

History

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

Good features

KS3

- Notable features of work at KS3 are the extent of pupils' subject knowledge and the soundness of their enquiry skills. For example, pupils can explain how and why historical interpretations differ by reference to the reliability of available evidence; they also understand the relative strengths and weaknesses of both primary and secondary source material.
- By Y9, pupils studying Nazi methods of propaganda understand that unreliable evidence can still be useful. They can also deploy source material evaluated in this way to construct accounts of Hitler's rise to power and of the role of women in Nazi Germany.
- Able pupils in Y9 demonstrate impressive understanding of the importance of context when interpreting sources and produce First World War diaries of outstanding quality.

KS4

- Over the last two years, GCSE results have shown 45.3 per cent and 36.0 per cent of pupils gaining A*-A grades and 82.1 per cent and 83.2 per cent gaining grades A*-C. These are very good results.
- At KS4 - as at KS3 - pupils demonstrate advanced thinking skills from the outset.
- For example, when evaluating sources for utility, pupils of differing abilities understand the need, not only to identify strengths and weaknesses but also to link usefulness to purpose.
- Year 10 pupils demonstrate sophisticated understanding of the causes of change in discussing the relative significance of the Suffragette campaign and women's war work in advancing the political role and status of women between 1900 and 1970.
- The most remarkable feature of work at KS4 is the readiness of most pupils to think critically. For example, their ability to resist a proposition, or identify points of both agreement and disagreement from available evidence allows them to produce balanced, well-structured arguments.

Sixth form

- Success at A level is well above the national average.
- Sixth form students of differing abilities demonstrate an unusually wide and deep knowledge of subject matter and produce extended coursework essays of impressive quality.
- Most students in Y12 can evaluate a hypothesis by reference to the evidence available to an historian and can construct well-balanced causal explanations.
- Students in Y13 understand the purpose and power of synoptic analysis. They use this, for example, to identify and interpret significant patterns of development in a 'long view' of Welsh history since 1880, or to assess the causal impact of developmental 'cross-currents' on events such as the French Revolution.
- Students can adjudicate between competing interpretations by reference to evidence inferred from sources and attempt, in the best work, to resolve the apparent conflict by means of a synthesis.

Shortcomings

- Pupils' understanding of causation, although good, is generally less well developed than other areas of understanding. At KS3, they can distinguish between short and long-term causes but generally do not understand why the distinction is necessary. At KS4 and beyond, pupils can identify several causes of an event in increasingly well-structured explanations but lack a method for demonstrating why some causes were more (or less) important than others.
- Although pupils in Y8 and Y9 make good progress in interpreting sources of evidence, they lack more basic understanding about where sources come from, or about how their value can be affected by the circumstances of their production.

Since the previous inspection, standards have improved amongst less able students in the sixth form. More use is made of ICT for word processing and research, but familiarity with databases and simulation programs is as yet undeveloped. Pupils and students now undertake fieldwork projects in all three key stages.

Geography

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

Good features

KS3

- The majority of pupils achieve good standards, with many able to express their understanding clearly.
- They are able to apply their knowledge in context to specific case studies at local, national and international level.
- Overall standards are at least consistent with national expectations, and in most cases well above those levels.
- Pupils are well adept at the main key skills of oracy, numeracy and graphicacy; Information communication technology although not transparent in classroom activities, is good in pupils' files and course work.
- Year 9 work is particularly good, with the role-play work on Kenya a strong feature, containing several strands of learning strategies.
- Local field work on settlements and villages studies are of a very high standard.

KS4

- Examination results at GCSE level (at 86 per cent grades A*-C) are well above the Welsh average. CoEA students achieved good results (three A grades and eight B grades) with a considerable boost from the high standard of fieldwork undertaken as part of the course.
- The rate of progression of pupils across the two year groups is good, indicating a positive value added residual, and exceeding the departmental target.
- Pupils are well adept at the main key skills of oracy, numeracy and graphicacy; Information and communications technology, although not transparent in classroom activities, is good in pupils' files and course work.
- Fieldwork in Y10 is of a very high standard, with pupils able to apply field-knowledge to their classroom studies during Y11; this is particularly strong in their work in physical geography.
- The Y10 'weather watch' project is a work of excellence showing a whole range of geographical skills and application.

Sixth form

- Standards are high across the A level and AS courses, with some very high standards of work observed.
- Results of public examinations are very good (100 per cent pass at A level), with 80 per cent attaining A and B grades. At AS level, all 36 candidates achieved pass grades, with 24 gaining A-C grades.
- Fieldwork is a strength of the department and strongly manifested in the sixth form work and application of knowledge.
- Students show a keen interest in the course elements, and are able to utilise a whole range of skills and demonstrate their understanding with clarity of purpose.

Shortcomings

KS3

- A small degree of underachievement occurs in some mixed ability classes; often related to low literacy levels.

The department has consolidated its high standards, as perceived at the previous inspection.

Modern foreign languages

Standards of achievement are good at KS3, KS4 and in the sixth form.

Good features

KS3

- Pupils understand well the foreign language spoken by the teacher or heard on cassette and are keen to answer questions.
- The majority respond with enthusiasm to the range of activities prepared for them, speak with a good accent and give answers in full sentences.
- Most pupils show good understanding of written texts in the course-book and read for gist and detail.
- By the end of Y9 the majority of pupils write interesting and accurate descriptions and letters on school, home and holidays, using past, present and future tenses effectively.
- Pupils with SEN make progress throughout KS3 particularly in listening and speaking skills.

KS4

- A high proportion of pupils choose to study a foreign language and GCSE results at grades A*-C are above national averages. Boys' results equal those achieved by girls.
- Listening comprehension is good; the majority of pupils can identify details in recorded language.
- Pupils speak confidently and at length on topics prepared for the GCSE examination.
- Comprehension of authentic texts is good and pupils use dictionaries effectively.
- Pupils show a good knowledge of relevant grammar and the majority write accurately using a range of vocabulary and idiom. More able pupils have a secure grasp of complex structures and they produce written work of a very high standard, beyond the demands of the examination.

Sixth form

- Results in A level examinations in 2001 in French and German were above the national averages with a good proportion of A and B grades. In Spanish, students following a two year '*ab initio*' course to A level gained grades in line with the national average.
- Students in Y12 have made a rapid transition from GCSE to A level work and they organise their work well.
- Comprehension of the language, spoken at a natural pace, is good. In Y13, more able students respond at length, sustaining the conversation and expressing opinions.
- Students understand a range of authentic texts at the appropriate level and access the Internet for up-to-date information. They write with increasing accuracy in different registers.

Shortcomings

KS3

- Pupils do not use the foreign language in normal classroom exchanges with the teacher.

- There are insufficient opportunities to select books to read independently.

KS4

- Pupils are sometimes hesitant when speaking in unrehearsed situations and do not use the language as the normal means of communication in the classroom.
- Pupils do not have access to books and magazines to read for pleasure.

Sixth form

- Not all students have the confidence to speak at length. They tend to confine themselves to short answers when questioned.
- Absence hinders progress for a minority of students.

Since the last inspection there has been good progress in raising standards of achievement. Lessons are well planned and organised. Teachers provide a range of challenging tasks for pupils of differing abilities. All have the opportunity to read authentic texts in the foreign language. The lack of confidence in the use of the foreign language as the normal means of communication in the classroom remains.

Art

Standards of achievement in art are good at KS3, KS4 and in the sixth form.

Good features

KS3

- Pupils use a wide range of resources and materials with developing confidence, communicating ideas effectively through two and three-dimensions.
- They demonstrate a growing understanding of the visual language (line, tone, colour, pattern, texture, shape, form and space) and the majority apply this successfully to their own work.
- Most pupils record images effectively from direct observation and visualise ideas expressively from memory, feelings and imagination.
- Year 7 pupils' mask project shows a variety of individual, decorative outcomes, evidence of good observational skills and also problem-solving skills.
- Year 8 pupils record images from direct experience of the built environment and combine them imaginatively to produce pictures with a growing appreciation of colour and control of media.
- Year 9 pupils apply their study of the figure in small-scale three-dimensional models, skilfully capturing a range of different poses.

KS4

- In 2001, a significant percentage of the cohort was entered for GCSE and 75.5 per cent of pupils achieved A*-C grades, considerably higher than the national average.
- Pupils produce expressive, exuberant work, underpinned by a substantial grounding in fundamental art skills.
- Their units of work demonstrate a well-developed understanding of how research and investigating from both first and second-hand resources helps to give them ideas for their own work.

- Information and communications technology contributes effectively to the good standards: it is used to research information about other artists, to gain access to images and also to explore creatively.
- There are examples of good quality photography, both to record the processes involved in making artwork and also as a valid artistic medium in itself.
- Sketchbooks are visually exciting and support individual projects well.

Sixth form

- Students are very articulate in the way they discuss their ideas and intentions.
- They show considerable progress in the development of skills, knowledge and understanding, controlling a wide range of media on a variety of scales, including computer-generated artwork.
- Students review and modify their work with increasing independence and assurance.
- Sketchbooks show considerable progress: they are stimulating repositories of ideas and experiences, visual and written notes, experimentation and exploration.
- Students' experiences of working alongside other artists, craftworkers and designers and also of visiting galleries both home and abroad make a significant contribution to a mature understanding of art.

Shortcomings

KS3

- A minority of less able pupils have difficulty in recording from imagination and tend to fall back on stereotypical images.
- Pupils with SEN do not have the same curricular provision as their peers, and this has a negative impact on their standards of achievement in art.

KS4 and the sixth form

- A small minority of students lack the necessary self-motivation to complete their coursework in the given time and this affects standards.

All key stages

- Inefficient management of resources in some cases means that pupils do not have enough independent access to materials and equipment. This sometimes results in frustration and impedes pupils' progress.

The department has made many improvements since the previous inspection. There are now more opportunities for pupils to work on a large scale. Written work is more personal, not so derivative. There is greater awareness of Welsh culture. There are far more opportunities to explore and create computer-generated art.

Music

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

Good features

KS3

- Pupils achieve good standards overall in performing, composing and appraising music.

- Pupils sing a variety of songs, in up to three parts, with confidence. They produce a pleasing tone and give appropriate attention to musical detail and expression.
- Pupils perform various pieces and their own compositions on classroom instruments and keyboards. Most pupils, including those with SEN, make good progress and maintain secure ensemble when performing together in pairs or larger groups.
- Pupils improvise and compose in response to a variety of interesting stimuli. Most pupils collaborate well in pair and group work and explore and combine sounds effectively. Sound pictures and incidental music, as well as more structured melodic work, often display imagination.
- Most pupils have a good awareness of musical elements and are able to identify features in recorded extracts of music from different styles. More able pupils make extended perceptive comments when evaluating their own and others' music-making.

KS4

- Results at GCSE in recent years have been well above the national average.
- Pupils in Y10 and in Y11, drawn from the full ability range, make suitable progress in vocal and instrumental performing and achieve good standards.
- Pupils develop composing skills through a number of suitable "common" tasks. Standards are good with many compositions demonstrating imaginative treatment of ideas and a good sense of style and structure.
- Pupils' appraising skills vary from satisfactory to very good and are good, overall. Pupils are, to varying degrees, able to discern technical and expressive features in music from different styles and periods.

Sixth form

- Results at A level in recent years have been well above the national average.
- Students are able and experienced performers and achieve high standards.
- Students show personal initiative and a good understanding of the chosen medium in their compositions. Standards are, in general, very good.
- Year 12 coursework essays, which are often of very good quality, and Y13 students' knowledge of their set-work and the associated topic, reflect personal research and a good understanding of the music related to the topics being studied. Aural skills, though uneven, are good, overall.

Shortcomings

KS3

- A few middle and lower ability pupils in a few classes at KS3 are not always fully focused on their tasks and make only limited progress.

Standards have improved in all key stages since the last inspection. The number of pupils opting for music at KS4 has increased substantially and planning for the use of ICT, in all key stages, is well in hand.

Physical education

Standards of achievement are good at KS3, GCSE and A level. They are satisfactory in the core curriculum at KS4. Physical education is not offered as a non-examination subject in the sixth form.

In all physical education lessons, pupils:

- display a positive attitude and commitment;
- work well as individuals and in small groups;
- are able to undertake an effective and safe warm up;
- are able to make appropriate evaluations of their own and others' work.

Good features

KS3

- In dance, pupils are able to effectively create, perform and repeat suitable routines to selected stimuli.
- In gymnastics, pupils move and place apparatus safely and correctly and display a basic understanding of sequence composition; some are able to display control and variety in their work.
- In football, pupils display good sending and receiving skills, as well as a sound understanding of attacking and defending principles of invasion games.
- In athletics, Y7 boys display appropriate understanding of the demands of sprinting.

KS4

- In athletics, Y10 boys are effectively able to work independently of the teacher, for example, undertaking a variety of roles such as participant and time keeper.
- Pupils are able to confidently discuss principles of attack and defence in invasion games.
- Pupils display a sound understanding of a range of issues involved in health related exercise.
- In the GCSE course, pupils competently relate theoretical aspects during practical situations.
- In gymnastics, individual movements are performed with precision and clarity.
- Pupils also know the essential components of an effective routine.
- GCSE results are above the national average.

Sixth form

- In the A level course, students display a sound understanding of the concepts involved in the various aspects of the course, particularly in exercise physiology.
- Students are able to grasp the opportunities provided to relate particular issues to their own performances and experiences.
- Students speak clearly and coherently, and their written work is accurate and fluent.
- A level results are above the national average.

Shortcomings

KS3

- In athletics, Y9 girls display ineffective technique in throwing events and a lack of knowledge of the rules.

KS4

- In volleyball, Y10 pupils display a lack of precision and consistency in their performance.
- Pupils' knowledge and understanding of tactics and strategies of net games are underdeveloped.
- The number of non-participant and absentee girls in Y11 adversely affects the standards achieved.

Progress since the previous inspection is good. Weaknesses identified have been addressed by increasing the time available at KS4, while support is now provided for some pupils with SEN. In addition, GCSE and A level courses have been introduced, with good results being achieved.

Religious education

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

Good features

KS3

- Pupils across the ability range have a good knowledge and understanding of the units of work studied, which reflect the requirements of the local agreed syllabus.
- Most have a good understanding of Christian beliefs and write clear explanations of the function of objects, people and what it means to belong.
- Pupils can recognise the distinctive features of other religious traditions and symbols, for example, Judaism and Hinduism, and know of ways in which religion and other beliefs affect how believers live their lives.
- The less able are successfully building on good knowledge, and can ask searching questions.
- Pupils' ability to evaluate and reflect improves significantly by Y9, so that pupils express their own views intelligently and the more able at length, supporting their arguments with good evidence.

KS4

- All pupils are entered for a GCSE accredited course at KS4 and results are good.
- Pupils have very good knowledge and understanding of pertinent facts and of the current issues and problems facing society and the individual.
- Pupils offer valid reasons for their personal responses to religious creeds and practices, and in discussion of questions raised by human experience they show much maturity in offering an opinion.
- Less able pupils are making very good progress. They understand that people have different views and show respect for others' beliefs. They use technical terms well.

- A good percentage of the pupils entered for the GCSE short course gain A*-C grades.

Sixth form

- Students acquire a range of skills that enables them to explore moral and social issues and to express their own responses to the questions and issues raised in the process.
- In their presentations to the class, students have good ability to analyse, interpret and evaluate critically the information gathered from different sources.

Shortcomings

KS3

- In a minority of lessons immature comments from pupils disrupt the pace of the lesson.
- Pupils' self-evaluation of their work and setting targets for improvement are underdeveloped.
- The use of ICT is underdeveloped.

Sixth form

- Awareness of religious attitudes to moral and religious issues is less well developed in some lessons.

Since the last inspection standards of achievement and progress have been maintained.

Religious studies

Standards of achievement are very good and the GCSE results are well above the national average, as are the proportion of the year entered for the exam.

Good features

- Pupils show very good knowledge and understanding of the key concepts within religious beliefs, teachings and doctrines and how these are expressed in texts, writings and practices.
- They are able to recall factual information from previous learning and show an increasing ability to apply what they know in different contexts.
- Pupils' oral responses are well expressed and articulate; written work is well presented and they provide well-argued pieces of extended writing.
- Pupils use religious language and terminology in context.
- The written work of the more able shows development in the ability to analyse and interpret information they are given.

Since the last inspection standards of achievement and progress have been maintained.

Personal, social and health education

No PSHE lessons were taught during the week of the inspection. Scrutiny of pupils' written work and talking to pupils from each year group shows that the work is well co-ordinated and is valued by most pupils. Standards are good throughout.

Good features

KS3

- Year 7 pupils take part in meaningful activities to assess how well they have settled down in their new school.
- In health lessons they have good knowledge about the changes that occur in their bodies during adolescence and what are the effects of these changes on both sexes.
- They know about the dangers of smoking and the importance of eating healthily.

KS4

- Pupils become aware of the main implications of leaving school for the world of work and the importance of aspects such as punctuality, collaboration within a team and being self-reliant.
- They gain knowledge and understanding of a range of personal and social matters, including aspects of health, for example, the effects of drugs on the body and the individual lifestyle.
- Pupils' experiences and knowledge are enriched by a good number of outside speakers and ICT.

Since the last inspection good progress has been made in developing PSHE across the curriculum.

Business studies

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

Good features

KS4

- Pupils show a lively, enquiring approach with evidence of original thought and well balanced, critical argument.
- Pupils increasingly take responsibility for their own learning.
- Pupils' examination performance is strong. Pupils improve or sustain high standards. Achievement is good.
- Pupils acquire a good understanding of scarcity, choice and opportunity cost and how they relate to business.

Sixth form

- Students have a strong work ethic.
- Able, well motivated students distinguish between facts and opinions.
- Very good examination results are achieved.
- Students benefit from constant monitoring and good guidance on various sources of information to make reasoned judgements.
- Standards of work are above average. Students make good progress and achievement is very good.
- Students are good at asking questions and responding to issues raised by others.
- Students are involved in setting personal learning goals.

- Students' oral communication is clear and coherent.
- Students undertake extension or enrichment work when mastery of a core area has been shown.
- Students can interpret information, carry out calculations and present findings.
- Students can apply knowledge and understanding using appropriate terms, concepts, theories and methods effectively to address problems and issues.

Shortcomings

KS4

- Too few pupils complete homework for extension and enrichment of classwork.
- Although most pupils are well behaved there is a minority whose attitudes and behaviour disturb the learning of others and cause underachievement.

Sixth form

- Not all students adhere to deadlines to complete work promptly.

The school has made very good progress since the previous inspection. Pupils at KS4 and students in the sixth form now benefit from more independent learning. Teaching has improved since the last inspection and expectations are high. There is a good understanding of what is needed to improve the provision of business education. Students are provided with opportunities to plan, analyse and evaluate their work. There are good contacts with local employers to ensure there is a supply of relevant information.

Drama

Standards of achievement are good in this KS4 subject.

Good features

- The majority of pupils are committed to producing their best work. They co-operate well in group and class activities, contributing willingly to the development of a piece of work.
- They record their rehearsal process regularly; the more able write in detail and fluently, conveying their ideas imaginatively.
- In their performances, many pupils demonstrate maturing understanding of a character in keen detail using movement, voice and facial expressions.
- They are aware of the principles of staging, lighting, sound and acting tools such as accent and body language.
- Pupils listen carefully carrying out instructions promptly and accurately.
- In preparation for examination pieces pupils move comfortably and capture attention.
- As an audience pupils are generally perceptive and make informed, evaluative comments.

Shortcomings

- Pupils do not develop formal drama skills until KS4. Consequently some pupils lack confidence when performing.
- Some written work is marred by inaccuracies or is too superficial.

The good standards achieved at the time of the previous inspection have been maintained.

Geology

In this sixth form subject, standards of achievement are very good.

Good features

- Examination results in 2001 were well above average, with 87 per cent of candidates gaining A and B grades; the mean grade is significantly above the Wales average. At AS level, the subject was again very successful with all candidates gaining pass grades (75 per cent A/B); again the mean grade score was above the Welsh average. The results are consistent with high attainment levels achieved over a number of years.
- Students exhibit good awareness and understanding of many concepts of geology, including basic palaeontology, mineralogy, plate tectonics and associated lithospheric elements, as well as general physical structures of the earth.
- Students are also well versed with the impact of geological features and processes on human activity, including the implications of mineral deposits and water management on human development.
- Good oral skills are demonstrated by the two groups, with some profound analytical work expressed by some able students. Students were also able to synthesize a wide range of geological facts from a range of sources, sharing conclusions and results.
- Students are able to use geological data constructively, with good knowledge of the properties of the mantle and lithosphere exhibited by all group members. All students exhibit good oral and written skills, and utilize information technology skills for aspects of their work.

Child development

Pupils are able to study this KS4 subject to GCSE and CoEA level. Standards of achievement are good.

Good features

- Pupils experience a range of practical and theoretical activities.
- The majority of pupils are able to recall and discuss previous work, showing sound knowledge and understanding of the care and development of babies and young children.
- Investigative work is well focused and presented in a variety of visual forms.
- The quality of extended writing is good for the ability level of the pupils.
- Learning experiences in Y11 are enhanced through visits to a local hospital, clinic and play group.
- CoEA pupils produce well presented folio work and colourful, original, practical items.
- GCSE pupils produce perceptive observations and analysis of individual children for their case studies.
- The broad prescribed tasks in Y11 show appropriate considerations of the dietary needs of young children and food products developed are generally appropriate and well finished.
- The use of ICT for presentation and analysis is good.

- Although standards achieved in recent external examinations were below national averages for top grades, pupils achieved well in relation to their ability.

Shortcomings

- A minority of Y10 pupils experience difficulty with recall of key facts.
- A significant number of Y10 pupils are not completing homework to deadline dates.

This subject was not reported on separately in the previous inspection.

Vocational education**GNVQ – Health and Social Care - Intermediate**

Standards of achievement within the small group of Y12 students studying this subject to Part 1 level are good.

Good features

- Students demonstrate a good understanding of issues relating to the organisation and roles within health and social care establishments.
- Effective use is made of professional speakers, visits and regular placements within the community.
- Investigative and research skills are well developed.
- Students successfully interview clients, analyse their results and make pertinent recommendations for the promotion of health and well-being.
- They are aware of a range of factors that affect personal development.
- Communication skills are developed well through mature discussion and extended report writing.
- Good review proceedings and tutor feedback enable students to make good progress over time.
- Students are attentive, co-operative and committed to their tasks and presentation of their work is good.

Shortcomings

- The lack of computers in the teaching base limits the opportunities for more integral use of ICT.
- Protracted absence has resulted in three students being withdrawn from the course.

Progress since the previous inspection has been maintained. However, there has been a reduction in the number of courses, at different levels, offered in this vocational area.

8. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

8.1 Progress Since the Last Inspection

Key Issue 1: Agree and implement whole-school strategies and monitoring procedures to extend the level of challenge for pupils in unfamiliar situations; reinforce cross-curricular skills; disseminate good practice within and across teaching teams; and secure more effective follow up of work missed or left unfinished by pupils.

Good progress has been made. The school has increased the range of teaching and learning strategies employed in classrooms. Teachers share good practice to provide pupils with meaningful learning experiences. They also ensure that most pupils complete their work and/or catch up on work missed.

Key Issue 2: Continue to implement existing plans and build on strategies to enhance the Welsh ethos of the school and the quality of provision and challenge for the increasing numbers of pupils entering the school with a good level of competency in the Welsh language.

Good progress has been made. Proficient learners now take Welsh second language GCSE in Y10 (15 A* out of 23 in 2001). This group then follows AS courses in Y11. The first group undertaking Welsh first language will be examined in 2002. Good performance in Y9 NC tests from pupils undertaking first language in 2000 and 2001 is encouraging. There are now two Welsh medium registration groups in each year group. Plans were considered ambitious by a follow up visit from Estyn.

The implementation of the *Cwricwlwm Cymreig* is a strong feature of the work of several departments. The Welsh ethos of the school has been strengthened by work on Welsh culture and heritage in several departments, pupils' participation in Welsh festivals, St David's Day events, Urdd competitions, visits to Glan Llyn and Llangrannog.

Key Issue 3: Instigate a proactive approach and plan for the application of information technology across the curriculum through the provision and coordination of computer hardware and software, staff training, monitoring of subject developments and recording of pupils' progress.

Satisfactory progress has been made. The school has organised a massive programme of investment. Most staff are now competent users of ICT, curriculum applications are made clear in schemes of work, but practice is still not widespread.

Key Issue 4: Improve the planning, delivery and monitoring of aspects of the curriculum which prepare pupils for adult life, including careers education, links with industry and commerce, pupils' work experience and the issues arising from scientific and technological developments.

Good progress has been made. In 2000 the school obtained *The Award for Quality Provision in Careers Education and Guidance*. The careers education and guidance modules have been redesigned. There is an enhanced programme of careers advice. Pupils benefit from an improved work experience programme. Effective links with university departments and careers service have been established.

Key Issue 5: Tackle the shortfall in the length and detailed organisation of the taught week to bring it up to Welsh Office minimum recommendations; to ensure adequate teaching time for mathematics and physical education at KS4 and PHSE; and to improve the punctuality for the start of afternoon teaching in particular.

Good progress has been made. The taught week now complies with NAFW recommendations. Time allowances for mathematics, physical education and PSHE are now adequate and punctuality is no longer a problem.

Key Issue 6: Comply with the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship.

Unsatisfactory progress has been made. The school still does not comply with the requirement for a daily act of collective worship.

8.2 Key Issues for Action

1. Continue to raise standards in all subjects, but particularly in those where achievement is currently assessed as satisfactory, and for pupils of below average ability, by using an improved and more appropriate range of teaching and learning strategies.
2. Without further delay, continue improvements in the school's accommodation overall and particularly that for physical education.
3. Comply with the statutory requirements for the provision of a daily act of collective worship.

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

Name of School	Penglais School
School type	LEA maintained
Age-range of pupils	11 to 18
Address of school	Wauanfawr Aberystwyth Ceredigion
Post-Code	SY23 3AW
Telephone Number	01970 624811

Headteacher	Mr H Davey
Date of appointment	September 1992
Chair of Governors	Dr M Jalloq
Registered Inspector	Mr B W Medhurst
Dates of inspection	15–19 April 2002

B. School Data and Indicators

<i>Number of pupils in each year group</i>								
Year group	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13	Total
Number of pupils	206	224	211	211	189	111	85	1237

<i>Total number of teachers</i>			
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time equivalent (fte)
Number of teachers	70	15	76.42

<i>Staffing information</i>	
Pupil:teacher (fte) ratio (excluding special classes)	16.2:1
Average teaching group size	23.1
Overall contact ratio	70%

<i>Percentage attendance for three complete terms prior to the inspection</i>								
	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13	Whole school
Term 1	94.2	92.6	93.0	92.5	91.9	89.2	87.2	91.6
Term 2	93.1	91.1	91.0	91.2	91.4	88.5	85.2	90.9
Term 3	92.4	92.9	90.7	90.3	92.1	88.0	89.1	91.0

<i>Number of pupils excluded during 12 months prior to inspection</i>	41 temporary 0 permanent
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C. Results of National Curriculum Assessments and Public Examinations

National Curriculum Assessment KS3 results: 2001																
Total number of pupils in Y9: 208																
Percentage of pupils at each level																
			D	A	N	B	W	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8/EP	
EN	Teacher Assessment	School	0	0.5	1.0		1.0	0	0	7.2	23.6	33.2	23.6	10.1	0	
		National	0	1	1		0	0	3	10	22	34	21	8	0	
	Test	School	0	4.8	1.0	0					8.2	23.6	30.3	20.7	11.5	
		National	0	3	2	3					9	22	33	19	10	
MA	Teacher Assessment	School	1.0	0	0		0	0	1.0	7.2	24.0	32.7	23.1	10.6	0.5	
		National	0	1	0		0	0	1	10	23	25	26	13	1	
	Test	School	1.0	1.9	1.9	0					6.3	22.6	17.8	29.8	18.8	
		National	0	6	1	1					8	22	22	27	13	
SC	Teacher Assessment	School	1.0	1.9	0.5		0	0	0	3.4	22.6	24.0	31.7	14.9	0	
		National	0	1	1		0	0	1	10	24	31	23	9	0	
	Test	School	1.0	1.9	1.0	0					3.4	15.9	24.5	33.2	19.2	
		National	0	4	1	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:	55	In the school:	55
In Wales:	51	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 2001: 196			
The percentage of 15 year old pupils who in 2001:			
	School	UA	Wales
were entered for 5 or more GCSEs	90	89	86
achieved 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C	68	64	50
achieved 5 or more GCSE grades A*-G	88	88	84
achieved GCSE grades A*-C in each of mathematics, science, English or Welsh first language)	47	44	36
entered at least one CoE, GCSE short course or GCSE	96	100	97
achieved one or more GCSE grades A*-C	85	87	73
achieved one or more GCSE grades A*-G	95	98	92
achieved no graded GCSE	5	2	8
achieved one or more CoE only	1	2	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	68	64	50
achieved at least 5 GCSE grades A* to G, the equivalent vocational qualifications or a combination of both	95	98	92

For pupils aged 17, results in A/AS, GNVQs and NVQs			
Number of pupils aged 17 in January 2001:	95		
Number of pupils entered for 2 or more GCE A level examinations or equivalent in 2001:	77		
Number of pupils entered for fewer than 2 GCE A levels or equivalent in 2001:	95		
	School	UA	Wales
Percentage of pupils entered who achieved 2 or more grades A-C	68	75	62
Percentage of pupils entered who achieved 2 or more grades A-E	91	97	93
Average points score per candidate	24	21	18
Number of pupils who achieved a GNVQ Intermediate or NVQ at level 2	-		
Number of pupils who achieved a GNVQ Advanced or NVQ at level 3	2		

D. The Evidence Base of the Inspection

- Eighteen inspectors spent the equivalent of 56.5 days at the school.
- Two hundred and twenty-two lessons, including full and part time sessions were observed covering all curricular areas and, additionally, a sample of pupils' PSE work was inspected.
- Inspectors attended assemblies, tutorial sessions, registrations, and observed a range of extra-curricular activities.
- Inspectors held many discussions with the headteacher, members of the school's management team, heads of department, heads of year, staff with whole-school responsibilities, and members of support and administrative staff. The registered inspector and the music inspector met with the governing body prior to the inspection week, and the registered inspector met with the chair of the governing body during the week.
- Work across the curriculum, from representative pupils from each year group was examined. Pupils' work was also scrutinised during lesson observations.
- Inspectors held formal discussions with groups of pupils and students selected from Y7 to Y13. They also talked with many pupils informally.
- The registered inspector met the staff and some students prior to the inspection.
- Twenty-six parents attended the pre-inspection meeting. Two hundred and eighty-four replies to the questionnaire were received and analysed. Some parents also wrote to the registered inspector.
- Comprehensive documentation provided by the school was scrutinised before and during the inspection.

E. Composition and Responsibilities of the Inspection Team

Inspector	Type	Aspect Responsibilities	Subject Responsibilities
Mr B Medhurst	RgI	Context; Main findings; Educational standards achieved by pupils; Teaching; Quality of self-evaluation and planning for improvement; Leadership and efficiency; School improvement	mathematics
Mrs J Warr	Lay	Attendance; Partnerships with parents and community, schools and other institutions; Partnership with industry	
Mrs M Meredith-Jones	Core	Behaviour and attitudes; Support, guidance and pupils' welfare	English, drama
Dr D Francis	Core	Assessment, recording and reporting; Curriculum	science
Mr S Gale	Core	Staffing, accommodation and learning resources	design and technology, ICT
Mr H Evans	Core	Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; Provision for pupils with SEN	religious education, PSHE
Mr R Roberts	Team		Welsh
Mr E Price-Jones	Team		mathematics
Mr B Heard	Team		science
Mr J Hopkins	Team		science
Mr A Kelly	Team		history
Mr A Cornelius	Team		geography, geology
Mrs G Holland	Team		modern foreign languages
Mrs G Figg	Team		art
Mr A W Jones	Team		music
Mr T Phillips	Team		physical education
Dr N Carr	Team		business studies
Mrs M Herbert	Team		design and technology, health and social care, child development

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