

REPORT

on the

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

**PEN Y DRE HIGH SCHOOL
GURNOS ESTATE
MERTHYR TYDFIL
CF47 9BY**

School Number: 675/4012

Date of Inspection: 10 – 13 March 2003

By

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Registered Inspector W098/3292

Under Estyn contract number: T/26/02

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CURRICULUM NOMENCLATURE AND KEY STAGES

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

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

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

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

GRADE DESCRIPTIONS

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

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

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1. CONTEXT

The school and its priorities

Pen y dre High School is an 11-18 co-educational comprehensive school, situated on a high, exposed, extensive site overlooking the town of Merthyr Tydfil in the Taff valley: it serves mainly the Gurnos estate, the surrounding small towns and semi-rural districts. All pupils come from homes where English is the dominant language. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority groups is below two per cent.

The 1042 pupils, with mainly even numbers of boys and girls on roll, has decreased from about 1200 at the time of the last inspection in 1996, and includes a sixth form of 140 students, an increasing proportion of whom now choose to continue in the school or in other educational provision beyond the age of 16.

The intake is fully comprehensive but many pupils enter the school with below average scores in the national tests taken towards the end of KS2. Merthyr Tydfil is an economically disadvantaged area. Although pupils come from the full range of economic and social backgrounds, a high proportion come from backgrounds which are socially and/or financially disadvantaged. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, at just over 40%, is twice the Wales average.

Six pupils have statements of special educational needs, which is a very low proportion for the total roll. A further 249 pupils are on the school's register for special educational needs.

The school translates its vision 'creating opportunities for all people to reach their potential in a supportive environment' into its mission statement, 'raising attendance, raising achievement, raising self-esteem' and core values of 'respect, enterprise, performance', and is underpinned by a range of policies and initiatives, the detail of the school improvement plan and its associated goals and targets.

2. MAIN FINDINGS

The main findings of the report

- Pen y dre has successfully evolved its own powerful distinctive individual features and ethos. Through a range of enterprising initiatives, it serves pupils and its community very well.
- The standards achieved by pupils, based on ability, are at least satisfactory in 98% of classes and good or better in 59%. Very good standards are achieved in 5% of lessons and these occur in all key stages. These figures exceed the targets set by the National Assembly for the year 2002. (The standards of achievement in 95% of classes should be at least satisfactory and 50% good or better). Standards in KS3 and 4 are fairly even, with 53% in KS3 and 50% in KS4 classes good or very good. In the sixth form the figure is 85%. The proportion of good or better standards in classes has risen substantially in each key stage since the previous inspection.

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Key Stage 3</i>	<i>Key Stage 4</i>	<i>Sixth Form</i>
English	Good	Good	Very good
Mathematics	Good	Satisfactory	Good
Science	Good	Satisfactory	Good
Welsh	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	-
Design & technology (DT)	Good	Good	Good
Information technology (IT)	Good	Good	Good
History	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Good
Geography	Good	Good	Good
Modern foreign languages	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	-
Art (art and design)	Good	Good	Very Good
Music	Satisfactory	Good	Good
Physical education (PE)	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Good
Religious education (RE)	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	-
Religious studies (RS)	-	Good	Good
Personal, social and health education (PSE)	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Drama	Good	Very Good	-
Health and social care	-	Good	Good
Early years care and education	-	-	Good
Manufacturing	-	Satisfactory	-
Business studies	-	Good	-
Leisure and tourism	-	-	Good
Law	-	-	Good
Computing	-	-	Satisfactory
AVCE business	-	-	Good
Applied business	-	Good	-
Economics and business	-	-	Good

- At the end of KS3 NC tests in 2002, the percentages of pupils achieving level 5 or above in English, mathematics and science were below average in relation to national norms. The percentage gaining level 5 or above in all three subjects, the core subject indicator, (CS1) was below average. Nevertheless, the figures represent an important improvement in each subject since the last inspection.
- GCSE results have generally improved since the last inspection but remain below local and national averages. In almost all subjects, the girls' attainments usually out-perform those of the boys, often to a large degree. The school has been actively working to reduce this difference and to raise aspirations. Results in all subjects are adversely affected by the poor and intermittent attendance of a minority of pupils.
- Standards are good in the sixth form, which provides an extensive range of courses. AS results are good. In the 2002 A level examinations, the proportion of students who gained 2 or more grades A-C and two or more grades A-E matched local and national averages. The average points score matched local figures. GNVQ intermediate and advanced results were good.
- Results and achievement indicate that the school's provision gives good continuity and progression.

- Pupils' listening and speaking skills are generally well developed. Most pupils listen attentively. Almost all respond appropriately to instructions and comments. Many become confident speakers. They are given good opportunities for work in small groups.
- Many join the school with poor reading skills. Most make good progress. There are good opportunities to read out loud, but a significant minority are hesitant readers. There is little evidence of wider reading for pleasure. For some, reading is linked to text and worksheets.
- There is a wider variety of standards in writing than in other literacy skills. Higher attaining pupils write extended pieces which are coherent and appropriate to a range of purposes. In a few subjects the range of opportunities is limited.
- Good skills of numeracy are developed in the schemes of work of subjects. Calculators are used appropriately on many occasions.
- Although departments have planned ICT into their programmes of study, its full potential to aid and extend learning in an accessible, consistently planned and co-ordinated manner has yet to be realised.
- Where computer resources are good, some interesting work is undertaken. DT pupils use desk top publishing, control, CAD and CAD/CAM, as well as the internet and various subject specific software for research purposes and in developing and enhancing personal project study.
- Pupils make use of ICT in subject areas. They use word processing, databases, spreadsheets, the Internet and CD Roms for research, modelling and information.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural welfare

- The school's ethos is a strength and reflects a supportive environment to raise self-esteem with core values of respect, enterprise and performance.
- Pupils' spiritual development is good. Many subjects provide opportunities to reflect on differing beliefs, cultures and lifestyles and about the purpose of life.
- Assemblies are well organised. Themes reinforce the school values and celebrate achievement.
- Pupils' moral development is good. Pupils learn about issues that relate to prejudice, honesty, choice and responsibility. Most pupils respond well and treat their teachers and each other with respect. Racism, human rights, the environment and other moral and ethical issues are discussed sympathetically. Pupils display concern through their support of a wide range of local, national and international charities.
- Pupils' social development is good. There is a rich variety of extra-curricular clubs and activities in school and the wider community. School and year councils give the opportunity to take responsibility and contribute to the school's ethos and social life. Sixth formers provide good help to Y8.
- Pupils' cultural development is good. A wide range of activities and visits extends knowledge and understanding locally and further afield. Pupils are heavily involved in musical productions, concerts and competitive sports. European and multi-cultural education is reflected in many aspects and subjects. There is a successful Eisteddfod, with competitions in many subjects. Awareness of Wales and its culture is well developed and visible throughout the school.
- Attractive murals and displays which celebrate pupils' participation in school life and the environment, landscapes and history of the local community, present a strong eye-catching focus.

- A strong feature of the school is its work with citizenship and the links that have been created locally, nationally and internationally, with Norway, Poland and France.
- The overall quality of behaviour is good. A very small minority are occasionally unruly in class or boisterous in the narrow corridors. The large majority are keen to engage in their set tasks and sustain concentration. The school has high expectations of pupils' conduct, understood by all.
- Attendance has improved significantly since the last inspection. Despite extensive appropriate and effective procedures in place to promote regular attendance, it stubbornly remains below 90% and is unsatisfactory. Punctuality is good. Brisk, orderly movement between lessons ensures minimal delay.

Quality of education

- The quality of teaching has improved overall since the last inspection and is a strength of the school. It contributes significantly to pupils' achievements. It is at least satisfactory in 97% of classes and good or better in 69%. In 11% of classes there is teaching of very good quality and this occurs in each key stage. In KS3 61% of teaching is good or better. In KS4 65% is good or better. In the sixth form the figure is 89%.
- A high proportion of the good and very good teaching takes place in almost all subjects across the school. The consistency of the good teaching is a strength and displays many features of good practice, which have been shared.
- The match of activities to pupils' previous achievements and needs is good. Teachers know their pupils well. Expectations mainly provide realistic challenges to extend pupils of all abilities. New ideas are carefully explained.
- The best teaching is enthusiastic. Praise is used well to raise pupils' self-esteem and to reinforce the culture for learning. Teachers' good humour and patience help pupils, a proportion of whom are not easy to teach, to overcome difficulties and to persevere.
- Often skilful questioning checks understanding and prompts further progress. A good range of teaching strategies ensures that lessons proceed briskly and keep pupils alert.
- Teachers have good relationships with pupils and manage them carefully.
- Teachers' commitment and hard work extend beyond the timetable, formally and informally, to provide whatever support they can to improve pupils' chances to raise their achievements.
- The quality of assessment, recording and reporting is good. Pupils' work, including homework, is generally accurately marked, using an agreed whole-school system. In many lessons, good use is made of oral feedback about how work may be improved.
- Teachers and faculties keep complete and accurate records of pupils' work. Regular reviews, together with examinations, provide effective monitoring of pupils' overall progress.
- There are good procedures for identifying gifted and talented pupils and for monitoring underachievement.
- Assessment requirements for the National Curriculum, public examinations, vocational courses and the Code of Practice are all met.
- The process of building pupils' Progress Files takes place throughout the school and is very well linked with the pastoral and assessment systems. The final documents are well produced and of high quality.
- Reports give constructive and positive statements on progress. Parents have an opportunity to respond and there is an appropriate programme of consultation meetings.

- Good use is made of NC assessments and other data to identify those pupils needing extra support and in setting into teaching groups, as pupils move through the school.
- Overall, the reporting system has improved and is now good.
- The school aims to provide all pupils with a broad and balanced curriculum that is appropriate to their needs and abilities and in this it is largely successful. With the exception of provision of religious education in the sixth form, it meets statutory requirements.
- The extent to which the provision is socially inclusive is very good.
- In KS3, pupils are taught in an appropriate combination of mixed ability and setted groups. The curriculum goes beyond the minimum NC requirements.
- In KS4, all pupils study an extended common core and three options, which reduces to two for the majority who choose to undertake the double science award. Classes are offered in a number of subjects outside the timetable to enhance opportunities for access. Pupils can opt for vocational subjects. The “Freshstart” programme, with an enhanced vocational element, is proving successful for previously reluctant learners or non-attenders.
- The scope, nature and availability of post-16 provision is very good. Planning is well advanced to enhance this further in September when the Welsh Baccalaureate will be offered.
- Planning for key skills is good.
- Planning for the Cwricwlwm Cymreig is satisfactory overall.
- The effectiveness of homework on raising standards is generally good. Extensive homework clubs, staffed by subject teachers are a valuable initiative.
- Arrangements for the delivery and the content of PSE are good. The programme contains an appropriate and required range of topics. Form teachers are mainly responsible with external speakers when appropriate.
- Work experience is well organised for all pupils in Y10 and Y12. Pupils are well prepared and monitored. There is a good evaluation of the process on return to school.
- There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities to support and extend the curriculum, including traditional team games and individual sports. Pen y dre represented Wales in the European Super Schools sporting competition. As a result of the reputation of the school’s musicals, pupils took part in last year’s International Festival of Musical Theatre. There are regular visits and field trips to places of interest locally, further afield and abroad. Many teachers give valuable support in their own time to extend pupils’ experiences.
- The quality of the support and guidance offered to pupils is very good. The school’s established comprehensive and effective pastoral system ensures a thorough knowledge of pupils and their needs and that appropriate support is available for them.
- Pastoral and academic aspects are brought together cohesively, proving heads of learning with a comprehensive picture of individual pupils across subjects and enabling them quickly to note any changes in patterns of achievement, effort or behaviour.
- The school has a very positive stance to social inclusion and has invested successfully in three KS4 Freshstart initiatives.
- The quality of careers education is very good. Careers lessons are successfully integrated into the PHASE programme.
- Support for sixth form learning is good.
- There are sound procedures, known to all staff, for child protection and health and safety.

- The school's response to the requirements of the SEN Code of Practice is very good. All pupils are well integrated into the life and work of the school. SEN provision is satisfactory.
- In the small groups in KS3, pupils with SEN make good progress. Support teachers offer effective support to the Y7 group. KS4 pupils have suitable access to external accreditation in the Freshstart programme.
- Sixty KS3 pupils receive extra help in reading. This is well planned and pupils make steady progress towards acquiring competent literacy skills. However, the strategies are insufficient to meet the needs of the high number of pupils who require help.
- Teachers across the school are positive and well versed in their approaches and there are good examples of differentiated tasks and work is presented that is interesting and relevant to the pupils' ability. However, in KS3, in large mixed ability classes, there is insufficient support to ensure pupils with SEN make good progress.
- The SEN register is reviewed effectively. All pupils have very good IEPs.
- The recently appointed SENCO has a clear vision for development.
- Partnerships with parents, schools and other institutions are good and mutually beneficial. Links with the community are very good. There is a coordinator for lifelong learning, through which the school seeks to provide further educational, sporting and social life in the community. Coordinators for active citizenship and charity work have established good links with wider national and international committees. These have provided opportunities for pupils to visit foreign countries and Pen y dre pupils have hosted similar meetings for return visits to Wales.
- The school is working on extending existing curricular links further with its partner primary schools to complement the strong transition links. Good, supportive links with further education, in addition to providing for school leavers, have been profitably used to develop effectively more vocational KS4 provision.
- There are good, supportive relationships with an Education Business Partnership and Careers Wales Mid Glamorgan. Pupils participate in schemes such as Young Engineers, Young Enterprise, industry sponsored competitions and Compact. Several commercial enterprises assist in the provision of mentoring schemes.

Management

- The quality of self-evaluation and planning for improvement is very good.
- The school has successfully embedded a strong culture of continuous self-evaluation, target setting and improvement at all levels in all aspects of its work. There is clear focus on raising standards. Leadership has a good vision and understanding of the school's development. Much productive work has been accomplished.
- All staff belong to one of the school's improvement teams which gives them a clear sense of ownership. The whole-school improvement plan clearly identifies short and longer term targets, priorities and success criteria, which are closely evaluated and monitored.
- National benchmarks and externally validated standards are used to review aspects of the school's performance.
- Overall there is a high awareness of self-evaluation as a tool for improvement.
- The recently restructured senior team has established a very good overview and understanding of whole-school issues, in addition to individual members' whole-school responsibilities.
- The mission, aims and statement are displayed throughout the school and permeate its life. The governing body is knowledgeable and fully involved. Members bring a wide

range of expertise for the school's benefit. With the exception of a daily act of collective worship and provision of sixth form religious education, they have ensured that statutory requirements are met.

- The school is well organised. A particular strength is its overall, comprehensive coherence.
- The headteacher has provided sustained vision and leadership, purpose and sense of direction of a high quality. He is well supported, in particular by his deputy, and by the teaching and non-teaching staff throughout the school who work well together. The quality of management by staff with whole-school responsibilities, is good.
- A particular strength of the school's organisation has been the emergence of extremely strong common concerns, shared values and level of commitment.
- The financial management of the school is very good. Planning and expenditure are clearly linked to the priorities and objectives of the school development plan.
- In securing numerous and substantial grants for innovative projects, the school has successfully supplemented the budget, enhanced resource provision and improved the learning environment for the school and its community.
- Staff development is appropriately matched to personal, faculty, whole-school needs and the priorities of the school development plan.
- The school is very well served by its many non-teaching staff, who provide effective, valued contributions and support.
- The condition of the school's accommodation is mainly good. Good efforts have been made to enhance its internal appearance.
- Problems persist in physical education provision. Plans have been approved for ambitious redevelopments.
- The quality and quantity of resources are generally good. As a proportion of the total budget, the level of funding is well above the Welsh average.
- ICT resources are good. The pupil:computer ratio of 3.9:1 is very good. However, suites are fully used and subjects which have few departmental computers find difficulty in gaining access to suites for full classes.
- The library has moved to a larger room than previously, and has additional adjacent computer resources, but has far fewer books than recommended, is underdeveloped as a whole-school resource and there is no librarian.

Progress since the last inspection

The previous report identified eight issues. Progress has been made in addressing each issue. Progress has been good in 2 issues, satisfactory in 3 issues. There has been partial progress in 3 issues, which still remain.

3. EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

3.1 Standards achieved in subjects and areas of learning

The standards achieved by pupils, based on ability, are at least satisfactory in 98% of classes and good or better in 59%. Very good standards are achieved in 5% of lessons and these occur in all key stages. These figures exceed the targets set by the National Assembly for the year 2002. (The standards of achievement in 95% of classes should be at least satisfactory and 50% good or better). Standards in KS3 and 4 are fairly even, with 53% in KS3 and 50%

in KS4 classes good or very good. In the sixth form the figure is 85%. The proportion of good or better standards in classes has risen substantially in each key stage since the previous inspection.

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Science	Good	Satisfactory	Good
Welsh	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	-
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Information technology (IT)	Good	Good	Good
History	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Good
Geography	Good	Good	Good
Modern foreign languages	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	-
Art (art and design)	Good	Good	Very Good
Music	Satisfactory	Good	Good
Physical education (PE)	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Good
Religious education (RE)	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	-
Religious studies (RS)	-	Good	Good
Personal, social and health education (PSE)	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Drama	Good	Very Good	-
Health and social care	-	Good	Good
Early years care and education	-	-	Good
Manufacturing	-	Satisfactory	-
Business studies	-	Good	-
Leisure and tourism	-	-	Good
Law	-	-	Good
Computing	-	-	Satisfactory
AVCE business	-	-	Good
Applied business	-	Good	-
Economics and business	-	-	Good

At the end of KS3 NC tests in 2002, the percentages of pupils achieving level 5 or above in English, mathematics and science were below average in relation to national norms. The percentage gaining level 5 or above in all three subjects, the core subject indicator, (CS1) was below average. Nevertheless, the figures represent an important improvement in each subject since the last inspection.

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Standards are good in the sixth form, which provides an extensive range of courses. AS results are good. In the 2002 A level examinations, the proportion of students who gained 2 or more grades A-C and two or more grades A-E matched local and national averages. The average points score matched local figures.

GNVQ intermediate and advanced results were good.

Results and achievement indicate that the school's provision gives good continuity and progression.

3.2 Standards achieved in key skills across the curriculum

Literacy

Pupils' listening skills are generally well developed and standards of listening help progress across the curriculum. Most listen attentively and carefully to the teacher, to audio-visual resources, music and modern languages, to instructions, orally and considerately to each other. There is a minority of pupils who find concentration difficult or are impatient to complete tasks and miss some of the instructions. Almost all respond quickly and appropriately to instructions and comments and remain focused. Many become confident speakers and are willing to answer questions. Some are reluctant to contribute more than perfunctory comments or single word answers. They are given good opportunities to collaborate, discuss and negotiate well in small groups. Technical vocabulary and specialist terms are handled naturally.

Many enter the school with poor reading skills. Most make good progress. There are good opportunities to read aloud and many read out loud fluently and expressively and for information, but a significant minority are held back by poor reading skills, are hesitant readers and need support because of limited comprehension skills. The school is mindful of the problems pupils experience. Pupils mainly read a wide range of materials, but for some, reading is limited to worksheets and texts.

There is a wider variety of standards of writing than in other literacy and communication skills. Higher attaining pupils write extended pieces which are coherent and appropriate to a range of purposes in most subjects. In a few subjects the range of writing opportunities is limited. Lower ability pupils often have difficulty in most subjects in completing extended pieces of work without teacher help. Pupils are able to make notes. Although pupils take care in their work, there is a general problem with technical accuracy, which is improved by the practice of editing and revising coursework, in particular. Most work is well organised. As they move through the school, their styles and tone proceed well.

Numeracy

Standards in numeracy across the curriculum are satisfactory in KS3 and KS4 and are good in the sixth form.

The 'Spoken Language and Numeracy Group' (SLaNG) have responsibility for numeracy across the curriculum. A comprehensive 'Numeracy Focus' document was produced by the head of the mathematics department listing strategies and a common approach to topics for all departments. The impact of this document across the curriculum is currently being evaluated.

Pupils and students develop good skills of numeracy in their mathematics lessons.

Many subjects use mathematical skills within their schemes of work. Examples of the use of these skills include:-

- Analysis of data and use of graphs in English, science, history, geography, design technology, ICT, RE, music and all business subjects
- Shape and space in PE, design technology and art.
- Measurement of time, length, weight, area, volume etc. in PE, design technology, history, geography, art, MFL, and science.
- Spreadsheets (formulae and number) are used in ICT.

Calculators are used appropriately in many subject areas and on many occasions.

ICT

Although departments have planned ICT into their programmes of study, its full potential to aid and extend learning in an accessible, consistently planned and co-ordinated manner has yet to be realised. Computer equipment in subject individual departments is very limited. Opportunities to book the main ICT suites are constrained because of discrete ICT and computing courses.

Where computer resources are good, some interesting work is undertaken. In DT pupils use desk top publishing, control, CAD and CAD/CAM, as well as the internet and various subject specific software for research purposes and in developing and enhancing personal project study. Pupils make use of ICT in subject areas. They use word processing, databases, spreadsheets, the internet and CD Roms for research, modelling and information.

Useful opportunities are being developed for pupils in the 'E'learning scheme being trialled in Y7 and for 'Freshstart' pupils in Y10 and Y11.

4. ETHOS OF THE SCHOOL

4.1 Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

The ethos of the school is a strength and reflects a supportive environment to raise self-esteem with core values of respect, enterprise and performance. All concerned with the school work together to create an environment where pupils can develop to reach their potential regardless of background. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

Pupils' spiritual development is good. Spiritual awareness is developed in religious education, communal worship and in a number of curricular subjects such as art, history, and music. In religious education pupils become aware of the various religions throughout the world and discuss the impact that these differing beliefs have on lifestyles. In other subjects there are opportunities to reflect on art, literature and the wonders of the natural world. There are links with local churches and local clergy visit the school to take part in assemblies and RE lessons. There are two assemblies a week for all pupils. Each assembly is Christian in nature and both staff and pupils take an active part. An appropriate atmosphere is created, there is a hymn and pupils are given the opportunity to reflect on suitable themes that

reinforce the school's values and celebrate achievement. On days when pupils do not attend an assembly, a 'thought for the week' forms part of the tutor period but there are no acts of collective worship. This does not meet statutory requirements.

Pupils' moral development is good. Moral issues are regularly raised in collective worship, in 'thoughts for the week', and in lessons. Pupils learn about issues that relate to prejudice, honesty, choice and responsibility. Most pupils respond well and treat their teachers and each other with respect. Not all pupils are able to cope securely with the demands of living and working co-operatively in the school community, but the school's support and values encourage them to respond positively. Moral issues are raised regularly in RE, PSE and in many subject areas. Racism, prejudice, human rights, the environment and other moral and ethical issues are discussed sympathetically. Pupils display their concern and sense of responsibility for others through their support of a wide variety of local, national and international charities. Each year of the school has an adopted charity.

Pupils' social development is good. It is developed through a number of activities such as extra-curricular clubs and activities in the school and the wider community. Relationships are good and many pupils cooperate in pairs and groups. The school and year councils give pupils the opportunity to take responsibility and contribute to the ethos and social life of the school. Sixth form students exercise their responsibility in school by providing a drug education module in Y8 and by mentoring pupils in that year.

Pupils' cultural development is good. A wide range of extra-curricular activities extends pupils' cultural knowledge and understanding. These include visits to theatres, art galleries, museums and concerts. Pupils are involved in musical productions, concerts, and competitive sports. Pupils' European and international awareness is developed through specific aspects of the curriculum, such as geography, art and history, as well as through links with France. Multi-cultural education is reflected in aspects of work in many subjects such as English, art, history, modern foreign language, DT, and RE. Awareness of Wales and its culture have been well developed across the curriculum. There is a successful Eisteddfod with competitions in many subject areas and St. David's day is celebrated. Pupils in Years 7,8 and 9 go on residential weekend courses.

The ethos of the school is reflected in the attractive murals and displays of the local landscape, the history of the community and the celebration of the pupils' participation in school life and the environment.

A strong feature of the school is its work with citizenship and the links that have been created locally, nationally and internationally. Internationally there are links with Norway, Poland and France with European Education Projects and with the International Community Action Network. This created links with Atlantic College where discussion of needs led to local projects being carried out. There have been visits to the National Assembly in Cardiff which led to the school holding elections for year and school councils. Each department addresses the social and moral issues of citizenship and in PSE the ASDAN key steps award in KS3 and the key decisions award in KS4 reward pupils for their work.

4.2 Behaviour and attitudes

The overall quality of behaviour in school is good. The large majority of pupils are polite and courteous, respectful of one another and of their teachers. They move around the school

sensibly, in a comradely and orderly fashion. A very small minority are occasionally unruly in class or indulge in silly boisterous behaviour in the narrow corridors.

In lessons pupils' attitudes to learning are good, with all but a small minority keen to engage with the set tasks and working with sustained concentration. On occasion the pace and content of a lesson are insufficiently challenging to maintain good focus by all pupils and some become mildly disruptive.

The school has high expectations of pupils' conduct, clearly understood by all. Teachers apply the well regarded rewards and sanctions scheme fairly and equitably, effectively promoting good behaviour. There is a reliable and secure procedure for removing disruptive pupils from lessons thus safeguarding the educational progress of others.

No instances of bullying were recorded during the inspection but teachers and pupils acknowledge that a small amount of bullying occurs in school. Pupils affirm that instances are swiftly and effectively dealt with. The school's recent review of the policy for dealing with bullying has raised awareness among pupils and teachers and improved the efficiency of counselling; it has already brought about a reduction in instances of bullying.

School policies and procedures effectively eliminate sexism, racism and other forms of discrimination.

4.3 Attendance

Overall attendance during the last three terms was below 90% and therefore unsatisfactory. Uncharacteristically for a school of this type attendance levels are consistent across years 7 to 11. Attendance in the 6th Form is very variable and a cause for concern. The level of unauthorised absence from some classes at some times is also a matter of concern.

Childhood sickness and holidays taken in term-time contribute significantly to absence and there is also widespread parental condoning of the occasional day off. The ethos of the neighbourhood does not yet fully embrace the importance and the advantage to be gained from regular school attendance.

The school has appropriate and effective procedures in place to promote regular attendance and to pursue absentees; there is a good, supportive working relationship with an Educational Welfare Officer. Registration procedures on arrival at school and to individual lessons securely monitor pupils' presence and diligent contacting of the parents of absentees maintains pressure to attend and elicits reasons for absence. Effective initiatives, including good focus on employment requirements and provision of a broad, appropriate and supportive curriculum, prevent a decline in attendance in KS4.

Punctuality to school and to individual lessons is good. Brisk but orderly movement between lessons, effectively encouraged by staff on duty in corridors, ensures minimal delay to the start of lessons.

The school fully complies with the requirements of NAW Circular 3/99.

5. QUALITY OF EDUCATION

5.1 Teaching

The quality of teaching has improved overall since the last inspection and is a strength of the school. It contributes significantly to pupils' achievements. It is at least satisfactory in 97% of classes and good or better in 69%. In 1996, the figures were 90% and just over 50%. These figures exceed the targets set by the National Assembly for the year 2002, for there to be satisfactory or better teaching in 95% of classes and good or better in 50%. In 11% of classes there is teaching of very good quality and this occurs in all key stages. Only in a handful of classes is teaching unsatisfactory. In KS3 61% of teaching is good or better. In KS4 the figure is 65%. In the sixth form, 89% is good or better.

The school has produced a helpful guidance document on effective teaching and has an advanced skills teacher to help improve general strategies and practice overall. A high proportion of the good and very good teaching takes place in almost every subject across the whole school. The consistency of the good and very good teaching is a strength and displays many features of good practice which have been shared.

The quality of teaching is good in all subjects and in the sixth form. Teachers' up-to-date knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach is good, although a minority of teaching in history and religious education by non-specialists reduces the subject impact. Planning is good. Strategies to use and develop key skills are identified. In a number of subjects, teachers use high quality printed materials produced by the school, which are specifically tailored to the pupils and their prior attainment.

The match of activities to pupils' previous achievements and needs is good. Available data and targets are used well to plan future work. Learning targets and levels, known by pupils, provide a sharp focus. Teachers know their pupils, their strengths and weaknesses well. Expectations mainly provide realistic challenge and activities and resources are well adapted to extend pupils of all abilities, although sometimes expectations of what pupils can do are too modest.

The best teaching is enthusiastic and uses praise well to acknowledge effort, to build pupils' self-esteem and to reinforce the culture for learning.

Teachers have good relationships with pupils, manage pupils carefully and value their contributions. Their good humour and patience help pupils, a proportion of whom are not easy to teach, to overcome difficulties and to persevere. In a range of subjects, the use of a variety of teaching methods ensures that lessons proceed at a brisk pace and keeps pupils alert. Class and corridor displays often reinforce a working environment relevant to topics being studied. Group and pair work is a successful feature of many lessons and develops pupils' oral and negotiating skills.

Teachers move around the classroom well to monitor and assist. New ideas are carefully explained. Clear learning objectives are shared and reiterated during the lesson and checked in plenary sessions, which often give opportunities to pupils to lead this exercise. Feedback, oral or written gives some indication how work may be improved. Often skilful questioning

checks understanding and is used to prompt further progress. Most teaching increasingly leads pupils to form their own conclusions.

Some lessons which otherwise have many other satisfactory features have similar characteristics: Teaching relies too heavily on a single approach. Introduction and explanation by the teacher, usually accompanied by some limited questioning, is followed by individual written tasks. This method leads to good class control but fails to meet the needs of all those taking part. A lack of challenge which fails to communicate a sense of urgency. Sometimes the teaching provides more direct support than is really necessary because the pupils are not expected to cope.

Teachers' commitment and hard work extend beyond the timetable to weekly homework clubs in all subjects, revision and booster work prior to examinations and, in general, to providing whatever support they can to help pupils to raise their achievements and realise their potential.

5.2 Assessment, recording and reporting

The policy for assessment, recording and reporting appropriately aims to further pupils' progress. There are clear guidelines for integrating assessment into schemes of work. Implementation of the assessment policy is successfully delegated to faculties.

Pupils' work, including homework, is generally accurately marked using an agreed whole-school system. There is a variation in the quantity and quality of written comments on pupils' work. In the best cases, constructive and accurate marking includes helpful comments, indicating pupils' specific strengths and weaknesses, together with indications as to how to make further progress. In many lessons, good use is made of oral feedback, including good use of praise and encouragement. Pupils have good opportunities to reflect on their progress during individual meetings with their form tutors. Regular formal assessments are well related to NC levels and external examination criteria.

Individual teachers and faculties keep complete and accurate records of pupils' work and progress. Regular reviews, together with annual examinations, enable the school to monitor pupils' overall progress effectively. These are clearly and generally accurately related to NC levels or GCSE grades and the criteria for success are well known to pupils. Good use is made of NC levels to enable pupils to chart progress in their planners. Good central records are kept. There are good procedures for identifying gifted and talented pupils and for monitoring underachievement. A successful mentoring system in Y11 for pupils requiring extra support involves senior staff and local business people. Y12 students act as supportive mentors for Y8 pupils. University coaches help pupils with reading support. Assessment requirements for the National Curriculum, public examinations and vocational courses are all met.

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

Pupils' Progress Files contain appropriate and well written sections on their work experience, career action plans, academic and personal achievements. The process of building a record of pupils' academic, social and personal progress takes place throughout the school and is very

well linked with the pastoral and assessment systems. The well produced high quality final documents are presented at a special ceremony at the end of KS4.

Parents receive one full report each year, together with regular progress reports. Reports give constructive and positive statements on pupils' progress. Comments are often lacking in subject specific strengths and weaknesses. Parents have an opportunity to respond to the reports and there is an appropriate programme of consultative meetings. NC and external examination achievements are appropriately reported.

Good use is made of NC assessments, external examination results and other assessment data to identify those pupils needing extra support and in setting as pupils move through the school. School examination targets for subjects are often challenging. Heads of faculties, in conjunction with form tutors, make good use of whole school attainment records to identify relative underachievement and to monitor progress. An annual review and analysis of examination results is generally well used to evaluate attainment in faculties.

5.3 Curriculum

The school aims to provide all pupils with a broad and balanced curriculum which is appropriate to their needs and abilities and in this it is largely successful. The curriculum meets statutory requirements with the exception of religious education in the sixth form. Teaching time in the weekly timetable of 30 lessons meets the recommendation of the National Assembly. It furthers the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and prepares them well for adult life. The extent to which the provision is socially inclusive by ensuring equality of access and opportunity for all, including pupils with SEN, is good. However, no in-class support is provided, although there are no pupils who are disapplied or for whom the curriculum is modified. The school is organised into year groups each of which has a Head of Learning. In KS3 and KS4, cohorts are divided into sub-groups. There are ten faculties which correspond to curricular sub-divisions.

In KS3, pupils are taught in an appropriate combination of mixed ability and setted groups. The curriculum goes beyond the minimum NC requirements with the addition of lessons in drama, ICT and PSE. The quality, breadth and balance are good but a second foreign language is not offered. The time allocated to subjects is generally satisfactory but in music and religious education it is low and has an effect on progress and standards. Class sizes are satisfactory although in certain classes, as in French, large groups make it hard for pupils to refine their skills. Whilst NC requirements are met in physical education, there is an imbalance in the provision offered to girls which impacts on choices later in their school career. Several curriculum links with primary schools are strong. Y6 pupils from the five feeder primaries visit Pen y dre on rota once every five weeks to enjoy specialist science facilities. The link is consolidated with a regular primary-secondary magazine, "Y Gorau".

In KS4, all pupils study a common core of English, mathematics, science, ICT and technology and single lessons in Welsh, religious education and PE. They also follow a non-examination programme of PSE. This extended core limits option choices to three columns, reduced to two for the majority who choose to study for the double science award. Thus the breadth and balance of the curriculum for a significant majority of pupils in KS4 are restricted to two supplementary choices. Their combination of subjects could exclude a modern foreign language, a creative art or the humanities. Classes in a number of subjects are offered outside normal teaching hours to overcome this problem and this enhances

opportunity of access. Pupils can opt for a vocational examination subject from business, health and social care or manufacturing. A small number of pupils for whom the nature of traditional school-based learning is inappropriate are offered the "FreshStart" programme with an enhanced vocational element and increased access to ICT. Depending on the individual's ability and needs, he/she is placed into one of three groups and where appropriate is entered for external examinations. The course meets the pupils' needs, is individually centred and work skill orientated; it is proving successful.

There is an "open policy" for entry to the sixth form with students intending to progress to Higher Education being advised, at present, to take up to four A/S levels. They are also encouraged to "mix" AS units with AVCE and GNVQ courses. Returnees also have the opportunity to resit English and mathematics at GCSE level. All courses are subject to demand. The nature and scope of the current post-16 provision is good and will be further enhanced in the next academic year when the school offers the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification. Take-up is satisfactory in most academic and vocational areas but there are some small groups in both Y12 and Y13. There is no statutory provision for religious education. Some students have timetable clashes and cannot attend every lesson in subjects such as geography, law, economics and business and PE. This is partly overcome by the readiness of teachers to offer guidance and instruction after school. The Sports Academy, launched in 2001 with the aim of combining academic attainment with professional sport coaching, is presently reduced to offering soccer and rugby. This has the effect of not attracting girls to the programme.

Schemes of work are generally well planned to allow continuity and progression and opportunities for assessment are usually identified. Planning for the development of key skills is satisfactory. Their promotion in teaching throughout the school varies between each skill area and across departments or faculties with unsatisfactory standards being achieved in ICT in a number of subjects.

The effectiveness of homework and its impact on raising standards is generally good; however, examination of a range of pupils' planners suggests the amount and quality vary. Completion is also variable, especially among average and lower ability pupils.

Arrangements for the delivery of PSE are good. The subject is included in PHASES, a detailed programme of modular and individual topics. In Y7, tutors deliver a specified module to each class on a rotational basis; in later years, they are responsible for delivery to their own tutor groups. The programme covers an appropriate and required range of topics including careers education. It promotes the personal and social education of individuals through active learning, staff being the facilitators. One lesson per term is given to compiling the pupils' Individual Progress File.

Most subjects make satisfactory provision for the effective delivery of the Cwricwlwm Cymreig; delivery of the Welsh dimension in teaching is variable.

There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities to support and extend the curriculum. These include traditional team games and individual sports with Pen y dre representing Wales in the European Super Schools sporting competition. Pupils were also invited to take part in last year's International Festival of Musical Theatre as a result of the school's reputation for the quality of its musicals. However, the short lunch hour limits the time available for more

general musical and other activities. Most departments have after-school homework clubs and run regular visits and field trips to places of interest at home and abroad.

5.4 Support, guidance and pupils' welfare

The quality of the support and guidance offered to pupils is very good. The school's established comprehensive and effective pastoral system ensures that it has a thorough knowledge of the pupils and their needs, and that appropriate support is provided for them.

The pastoral system is based on form tutors, who are responsible to the Heads of Learning. The responsibilities of form tutors and Heads of Learning have been defined in detail and the inter-relationship between them and heads of subject departments outlined. In this way, pastoral and academic aspects are brought together effectively, providing a full picture of the development of individual pupils. The 'referral system' together with the 'Points to Success system' ensures that the Heads of Learning have a comprehensive picture of the performance of individual pupils across the subjects and are in a good position to note any change in the pattern regarding standards of achievement, effort or behaviour. To ensure continuity, pupils stay with the same Head of Learning and form tutor from Y7 to Y11. Consequently the tutors and Heads of Learning know their pupils very well. An assistant headteacher with pastoral responsibilities leads the team very well. Subject teachers are also supportive; they give time to aid the progress of individual pupils and there are regular homework and revision classes. Together with the leadership team, the Heads of Years 10 and 11 have been successful in mentoring individual pupils to ensure improved academic success.

The school has a very positive response to social inclusion, and has invested successfully in their three KS4 Freshstart programmes. Programmes of study are arranged involving core subjects, further education colleges and work placement. These pupils have achieved a very good improvement in attendance rates and the pupils involved have obtained good outside accreditation, reflecting their ability, at the end of KS4.

The very good, comprehensive PHASES programme is taught through weekly lessons on a rolling programme across the timetable. Form tutors deliver most of the programme, with support from those responsible and external speakers when appropriate. Detailed programmes of work are prepared for each year to correspond to pupils' ages, abilities and needs, and are reviewed annually. They offer effective support for tutors, and ensure progression and cohesion in the pupils' experiences. As part of the programme, appropriate emphasis is placed on health education and sex education. Aspects such as dangers of alcohol, drugs and solvents are discussed; some of the staff have received specific training in these areas.

The quality of the careers education and guidance is very good. There is very good access to objective advice and the relationship with the advisor from Careers Wales is very good. There is an appropriate range of information in the careers library which is well used and accessible. Careers lessons are successfully integrated into the PHASE programme from Y8. The programme makes good use of visiting speakers and pupils develop relevant skills effectively in the careers lessons. There is a comprehensive programme of work experience for Y10 and Y12. Appropriate placements are made, pupils are well prepared and monitored and there is a good process of evaluation when pupils return to school.

Support for the sixth form learning is good. There is easy access for discussion with the Head of Learning, careers advisor and senior staff. Subject teachers are helpful and supportive. Work placements, arrangements to visit universities and other Higher Education establishments are regularly made, and there is appropriate access to facilities. However, there is only limited space available for students for private study.

An assistant headteacher, together with the SENCO, undertakes the liaison required for child protection. Detailed guidance on policy exists for all staff; the process follows the guidelines of the UA. Fire drills are held regularly and a good number of the staff have completed a first aid course. Additionally, the school is mindful of pupils' health and safety in laboratories, workshops, around the school building and when undertaking educational visits or fieldwork.

It is evident that the vast majority of the pupils are happy in the school and have a positive attitude towards it. They state that they would readily turn to their teachers for support if the need arose. The systems established succeed to identify underachievement in terms of standards of work and lack of effort and to take effective remedial action. In this way, the school's pastoral system has a positive influence on standards of achievement.

5.5 Provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN)

The provision for SEN is satisfactory and the school's response to the requirements of the Code of Practice is very good. All pupils are well integrated into the life and work of the school and have access to a broad and balanced curriculum. Appropriate strategies are employed to meet the needs of pupils with SEN.

In the small groups in KS3, pupils with SEN make good progress. Good examples of differentiation in teaching, develop pupils' ability to express themselves clearly and explain their ideas using the subject terminology correctly. The support teachers offer effective support to the Y7 group. In KS4, these pupils through the Freshstart 2 programme, have suitable access to external accreditation courses.

Sixty KS3 pupils receive extra help in reading, by reading together with either teachers, learning support assistants or a learning coach. This is well planned and pupils enjoy the opportunity and are making steady progress towards gaining competent skills in literacy. However the strategies used are insufficient to meet the needs of the high number of pupils who require help with their reading skills and fluency.

Eighteen pupils are withdrawn from mainstream to be taught by a specialist teacher. They follow relevant individual programmes of language skills and develop useful strategies to improve their work. The six pupils with statements of SEN for specific learning difficulties (SpLD) are making good progress and their IEPs reflect the statements of SEN and their individual needs. Ten pupils identified with SpLD in Years 8, 9 and 10, who are on School Action Plus, do not receive support in reading and study skills from a specialist teacher.

Subject departments are responsible for providing suitable work for pupils with SEN within their curricular area. The co-ordinator distributes relevant information together with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) to promote the work. Teachers across the school are positive in their approach and there are good examples of differentiating tasks, and the work is presented in an interesting way that is relevant to the pupils' ability. However in KS3, in

large mixed ability classes, there is insufficient support to ensure pupils with SEN make good progress.

The statements for pupils with specific learning difficulties are reviewed effectively. Parents, external agencies and the UA are consulted as required. Eighty-three pupils are recorded on the School Action stage and forty-one on the School Action Plus stage. Arrangements made to identify pupils who need help are good and the Register of Special Educational Needs is reviewed effectively. All pupils on the Register have very good IEPs. Suitable targets are set and shared with the pupils and strategies are identified to assist the teaching.

The recently appointed SENCO has made a good start and has a clear vision for future development of the department. She is well supported by the SEN specialist teacher, the leadership team and the designated governor.

Since the last inspection, more strategies have been developed to ensure the success of the school's inclusion policy, especially at KS4. However, there is still only a limited range of strategies in KS3 to raise reading standards.

5.6 Partnership with parents and community, schools and other institutions

Overall the quality of information provided for parents, and parents' contribution to school life are satisfactory.

The functions of a school prospectus are divided between an attractive large format brochure, distributed to prospective parents, and the school's high quality newsletter, 'Horizons', which is distributed to all Pen y dre parents as well as those of Y6 pupils of the feeder primary schools. Between them these clearly written and very readable documents provide a good account of school organisation, the aims and objectives, curriculum, many school processes and pupils' achievements. However, they do not meet the statutory requirement to describe the school policy in respect of provision for SEN, disabled access, sex education, equal opportunities, complaints procedures, pupils' attendance and do not provide names of head-teacher, chair of Governors and the identity and period of office of governors. The information that is provided is not in a handy, easily referenced format.

Parents benefit from twice yearly reports on their children, informative discussion at parent evenings, access to reward ceremonies and their opinions are canvassed in determination of school policies. Parents feel well informed and involved at an appropriate level.

The school has very good, mutually beneficial links with the local community. There is a joint committee, and teachers nominated as co-ordinators for Lifelong Learning, Active Citizenship and Charity Work. These ensure a well-integrated programme of school/community activities in which the school seeks to provide for the community's educational, sporting and social needs, and individuals or groups from the community give support to school initiatives. Within the Citizenship and Charity activities, good links exist with wider national and international communities. These have provided opportunities for pupils to visit foreign countries to learn how those nations tackle school associated issues and Pen y dre pupils have hosted meetings for similar return visits to Wales.

Links with other schools and institutions are good. Regular discussion with headteachers of feeder primary schools, visits by staff accompanied by ‘Ambassadors’ from Y7 and Y8, and taster days for prospective pupils ensure good pastoral support for the new intake. A cross-phase project in science assists with curriculum continuity. Although currently less-developed, the school is working on curricular links in maths and English, and has identified link teachers in several other subjects. There are good supportive links with further education colleges which, as well as providing an extended range of option choices for school leavers, have been profitably utilised to provide an effective, more vocational, curriculum for less academic pupils in Y10 and 11. There are also good links with higher education institutions providing opportunities for 6th formers to explore these avenues of learning.

The school has well established links with several initial teacher training institutes, and many departments regularly provide training opportunities for students. These bring fresh perspectives to the classroom and effectively broaden experiences for school pupils.

5.7 Partnership with industry

The school has an effective policy and strategies for work-related education.

Careers education is constructively linked to personal attributes and to curriculum option choices. Opportunities are taken by several departments to reinforce the curriculum links by use of visiting speakers from local businesses and by participation in schemes such as Young Enterprise, Young Engineers or industry sponsored competitions. Pupils’ personal development is enhanced by a Compact scheme, currently being extended to all school years, and by support of local businesses in the Active Citizenship project. Several commercial enterprises assist in the provision of mentoring schemes for Y10 and 11.

Pupils in Y11 and students in Y12 benefit from a well-organised work experience. They are well informed beforehand, are encouraged to keep an objective and focused diary of their experience and gain from constructive personal de-briefing and whole class discussion afterwards.

The school has good, supportive relationships with an Education Business Partnership and Careers Wales Mid Glamorgan through which the work experience programme, mentoring schemes and staff placements in industry are brokered. Several staff have benefited from work-place experiences but this facility is not fully exploited.

Work-related education provides good stimulus for pupils, highlighting the relevance of curriculum studies and providing focus for the development of good personal skills and attributes.

6. MANAGEMENT

6.1 Quality of self-evaluation and planning for improvement

The quality of self-evaluation and planning for improvement is very good.

The school has successfully embedded a strong culture of continuous self-evaluation, target setting and planning for improvement at all levels in all aspects of its work. There is a clear focus on raising standards. Leadership has a very good vision and understanding of the school's development. Much productive work has been accomplished in this area. All staff belong to one of the nine school improvement teams which meet and report regularly. This gives all staff a sense of ownership. The whole-school improvement plan clearly identifies short and longer term targets, priorities and success criteria, which are closely evaluated and monitored. This plan includes improvement plans for each faculty under common headings to link with the overall plan. The audit process is transparent. Faculty heads report annually to the governing body. The roles and responsibilities of assistant headteachers are understood, although still evolving. Senior staff have been trained in observing the quality of teaching and learning and in providing feedback. Teachers are aware of the broader monitoring policy. Good practice has been identified and shared. The school analyses available information well to set performance indicators and targets. Teachers have a good knowledge of the use of data to compare and predict performance. Extensive mentoring is available to pupils.

The school reviews aspects of its performance against national benchmarks and externally validated standards, such as award of Investor in People, Quality Mark and Socrates Improvement through Self-Evaluation. A part-time external member of the leadership team is responsible as quality assurance controller. In 2000 and 2001 external consultancies carried out leadership and management reviews, the recommendations of which were carefully noted and largely adopted. The school's internal document 'The Capacity for Self-Renewal' realistically evaluates progress in achieving its goals and targets for improvement.

Reviews of the progress of important recent developments, are properly taking place and built in. Overall there is a high awareness of self-evaluation as a tool for improvement.

6.2 Leadership and efficiency

The previous inspection highlighted the quality of vision, leadership, management and governance. Even though the leadership group was fundamentally restructured and extended two years ago to meet the present needs and priorities of the school, the same judgement can be made.

The significant changes have resulted in a larger, but 'flatter' structure of headteacher, reduction to a single deputy headteacher and the creation of eight assistant headteachers, formerly faculty heads now with important individual additional specific whole-school responsibilities. Together with a further five middle managers and a part-time external quality assurance controller, this forms the leadership group. In addition to their specific responsibilities, the team has established a very good overview and understanding of whole school issues and meets regularly. Minutes are distributed to inform all staff. The quality of communication by individual members is now considered to be mainly good, consistent and improving.

In addition to their teaching commitments all staff are members of one of the nine school improvement teams, with elected chairs. Overall the resulting insights and sense of stakeholding or ownership brought about by these arrangements, have produced unusually

strong shared values, common concerns and levels of commitment. This is further confirmed by the many external awards the school has attracted. As in the previous inspection, the school's great strength lies in its overall, comprehensive coherence.

The headteacher has provided sustained vision and leadership, purpose and sense of direction of a high quality. An example of this vision is the current launch of an ambitious and enterprising initiative 'Pen y dre Plus Ltd', which coordinates and extends the school's delivery of a range of other services in the community and has attracted substantial grant aid. He is well supported, in particular, by his deputy who is responsible for the day-to-day running of the school and by teaching and non-teaching staff throughout the school, who work well together, which is reflected in the Investor in People Award. The quality of management at all levels by teachers with whole-school responsibilities, is good. Adults work very well to monitor and support pupils, Internal and external communication and the routine organisation of the school are very good.

The mission, aims and vision are displayed throughout the school, permeate its life and are endorsed by pupils and parents. The school has a distinct, positive ethos and culture. The range of policies is consistent with this philosophy. The governing body is knowledgeable and fully involved. Members bring a wide range of expertise to bear for the school's benefit. It discharges its responsibilities well and, together with the school, has been instrumental in bringing about continuing improvements and developing procedures for evaluating and reviewing progress. With the exception of a daily act of collective worship and provision of religious education in the sixth form, it has ensured that statutory requirements are met.

Financial management is very good; at all levels there is a good understanding of roles and responsibilities. The school has effective procedures in place to monitor its delegated budget and to ensure best value for money. Financial planning and expenditure are clearly linked to the priorities and educational objectives of the school development plan.

Good advantage is taken of the interest and expertise of the governing body. There is close liaison with its finance group which meets regularly and which receives detailed financial statements. It considers all the school's spending implications before presenting them to the full body.

The deputy headteacher designs the budget and has overall control of its implementation. Day-to-day administration and the orderly monitoring of expenditure is undertaken by the experienced bursar and two able administrative clerks. Money is allocated to faculties in accordance with a formula that is understood by all budget holders. An annual allocation of a small percentage of the delegated budget into an improvement fund has enabled the school to meet specific needs. In securing numerous and substantial grants for innovative projects, the school has successfully supplemented budget income, enhanced the provision of resources and improved the learning environment, not only for its pupils, but also for its immediate community.

The few recommendations of the most recent financial audit have been addressed.

6.3 Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

Staffing

There are 64 full time and 2 part time teachers. The pupil:teacher ratio of 16:1 and contact time of 75.9% are both appropriate to the size of the school. All non-teaching staff, including bursar, technicians, caretakers, nurse, dining room supervisors, coaches and administrative staff, provide effective support and make a valuable contribution to the everyday life of the school.

Teachers are well qualified and experienced. Nearly half have been at the school for 10 or more years. They are generally effectively deployed to cover their pastoral and curriculum responsibilities but occasionally pupils' quality of learning is reduced by the use of non-specialist staff.

INSET is provided for all staff, with appropriate help and advice given by a team of co-ordinators. INSET needs are appropriately matched to personal, faculty and whole school priorities. The school provides very good support for newly qualified teachers, ITT students and GRTP trainees.

Accommodation

The school occupies a large site and accommodation is sufficient to meet the curricular and pastoral needs of pupils. The condition of the buildings is generally good and on the whole, they are kept clean and tidy. Many corridors contain professionally produced murals which are much appreciated by pupils and visitors and which enhance the internal appearance. Other displays celebrate achievement in subjects and extra-curricular activities. The reception area contains the school's "Hall of Fame".

In the great majority of subjects, rooms are arranged to allow good communication within the faculty. Good use is made of classrooms. They are decorated in a stimulating way with an appropriate balance of pupils' work and the supportive work of teachers, thus creating a positive learning environment.

Procedures for dealing with site problems are good. Caretakers and cleaning staff work hard to ensure a high level of cleanliness throughout the area. In general, facilities have improved since the last inspection; however, a number of problems remain and the school is aware that concerns persist in the physical education area. Fields are waterlogged during periods of inclement weather and cannot be used. Many of the planned activities for the spring term have been postponed due to disruption caused by water penetration and the closure of the swimming pool. The Redgra pitch requires maintenance and the department now lacks outdoor tennis and netball courts thus limiting available options and pupil participation. The school has a good careers library but the general library facilities are inadequate.

CCTV cameras monitor the campus. Generally, the school is a secure area but greater prominence should be given to directing visitors to the main reception entrance. Appropriate health and safety systems are in place. A number of concerns were identified and reported to the headteacher at the end of the inspection.

Resources

As a proportion of the total budget, the level of funding for text books, materials and educational resources is well above the average for Wales.

The quality and quantity of resources across the school are good and have a significant impact on raising achievement. The resources of text books available across subjects are good. There is no computer in music, where there is also a shortage of tuned percussion instruments and quality keyboards. ICT resources are good and well equipped with updated and extended facilities. The pupil to computer ratio of 3.9:1 is very good. The success of discrete ICT and related subjects is such that other subjects who have few departmental computers and who wish to make use of the dedicated suites for full classes have great difficulty in doing so. There is no booking or coordinating link.

The library has been moved to a more suitably sized area than previously, is attractive and now includes an adjacent 14-station separate computer resource, but it still has far fewer books than is recommended. It is well used by the English department in lessons and as a book club, but is underdeveloped as a whole school resource. The school no longer has a librarian.

7. SUBJECTS AND AREAS OF LEARNING

Standards achieved by pupils

English

Standards of achievement in English are good in KS3 and 4 and usually very good in the sixth form.

Pupils enter the school with scores which are below average and in many cases, which are well below average.

Although below national levels, the proportion of pupils gaining level 5 and above at the end of KS3 has risen steadily to over 40%. Good progress is made during KS3 and 4, so that in 2002, despite a fall on the previous year, 32% of the cohort gained A*-C grades in English and 33% in literature, with an increasing proportion of A*/A grades. At all levels there is a marked difference between the performances of boys and girls. Twice as many girls than boys were awarded the higher GCSE grades A*-C, but at grades A*-G, the proportions are almost equal. AS level results were excellent. The 13 candidates were awarded 6A, 5B and 2C grades. Five students gained full marks. A level results were very good. All students gained grade D or above. Grades A-C were awarded to 71% of candidates.

These results demonstrate good progress.

Good features

KS3 and KS4

- Improving results in external tests and examinations.

- Most pupils with low literacy skills make good progress in response to the support they receive.
- Most pupils are considerate listeners with reasonably developed listening skills.
- Many develop as clear, confident speakers. Their contributions are increasingly extended and detailed.
- They pose and answer questions. The majority respond well to teachers' questions.
- They enjoy reading prose and dialogue in class. They read aloud confidently and clearly.
- In group work pupils collaborate well. They negotiate, discuss and express their opinions and ideas to fellow pupils.
- They come to adapt tone and register appropriately for a range of audiences and purposes.
- They establish insights into influence of characters in plot development and compare and contrast effectively.
- Increasingly, they appreciate the criteria for success.
- They can locate, select and reorganise facts, skimming and scanning texts to find specific information.
- As they move through the school, they develop inferential skills and an increasing ability to appreciate literary techniques.
- They show an increasing appreciation of the need to take notes, to draft and revise their writing, especially of coursework, so that final versions are largely accurate, with appropriate content and organisation and mainly good presentation.

Sixth form

- Students are mature and committed to the subject.
- They work well together to explore and analyse texts and to identify and evaluate possible interpretations, challenging each other and extending ideas in lively discussion.
- Students undertake effective research on the social and historical background to their set texts.
- They make authoritative and well considered presentations, speaking confidently and expressing cogent opinions.
- The skills of literary criticism are well developed.
- Students' written work is extended, well organised, relevant and accurate. Able pupils in Y13, in particular, produce superb writing which reveals a perceptive and detailed response to literature and an ability both to maintain a complex and sophisticated argument and to present it with fluency and conviction.

Shortcomings

KS3 and KS4

- A minority do not achieve a natural accuracy in their writing in terms of spelling, punctuation and grammar. The day-to-day work of many pupils is littered with errors.
- There are few strategies to support pupils with reading difficulties.
- There is little evidence of many pupils' wider reading for pleasure.

Good progress has been made since the last inspection.

Mathematics

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

In 2002, 53% of pupils achieved at least a grade 5 in the KS3 National Curriculum test. The boys achieved better results than the girls. This is below the national and UA averages.

In 2002, the percentage of A*-C GCSE grades was 23, with girls achieving significantly better than boys. This is below national and LEA averages. The percentage for A*-G grades was 66 with no significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls. This was well below both the national and LEA averages.

Ten students entered the A level examinations in 2002. 60% gained A-C grades and all gained A-E grades.

Good features

KS3

- Most pupils are keen and enthusiastic to answer questions. They give explanations and answers that are clear and usually accurate.
- They have an understanding of numbers, vulgar fractions, decimals and percentages.
- They can perform calculations with angles on straight lines, about a point, in triangles and in polygons.
- They have an understanding of number sequences to the nth term through the use of multiples of numbers.
- They have spatial awareness and can use appropriate units for distance, area and volume.
- In Y7, the more able pupils enhance their learning with the regular use of tiered computer programs on lap-top computers.
- Pupils with SEN make good progress, especially with the aid of a support assistant.

KS4

- Pupils can perform calculations both mentally and with the use of calculators. They can apply this knowledge in questions involving hire purchase, simple interest and compound interest.
- They have a sound knowledge of the angle properties of a circle and they can apply this knowledge when solving problems.
- They understand the concept of probability and can use tree diagrams to make calculations.
- The more able pupils can apply the simple sampling techniques involved with data processing in the statistics topic.
- Most pupils use calculators appropriately and correctly.

Sixth form

- Year 13 students understand a range of concepts in pure mathematics, mechanics and statistics and adapt their knowledge to solve associated problems.
- Year 12 students make good progress understanding the basic concepts in pure mathematics, mechanics and statistics.

- Sixth form students show their understanding of mathematical concepts in discussions and when, in turn, they lead their fellow students through the solutions of questions.

Shortcomings

- A small minority of less able pupils do not always finish their work and will do as little work as possible.
- The presentation of work is inconsistent across the department.
- Calculators are mostly used to advantage in the school but pupils do not estimate their answers to check if the calculator answer is feasible.
- A small minority of pupils rely totally on the use of a calculator and do not attempt to carry out simple mental calculations themselves.
- A very small number of pupils lack confidence and can become disruptive. As a result the learning process for other pupils is affected.
- In KS3, KS4 and the sixth form there is insufficient use of ICT to enhance learning.

Since the last inspection, standards of achievement have improved at KS3 and in the sixth form and are now good. However, in KS4 standards are still satisfactory.

Science

Standards of achievement are good in KS3, satisfactory in KS4, and good in the sixth form. In 2002, examination results in the KS3 NC tests and GCSE sciences were below national averages. At A level, almost all students obtained an A–E grade. Pupils with SEN have full access to the national curriculum and to accredited courses in KS4.

Good features

KS3

- Pupils generally have a good knowledge and understanding of current NC topics.
- A majority of pupils have a good recall of previous work, they can describe and explain key facts and ideas. They are able to apply their knowledge and understanding to problem solving. They make good progress through the key stage.
- Scientific vocabulary is appropriately used by a majority of pupils in written and oral work. Many pupils make good oral contributions in class.
- Pupils with SEN make good progress in relation to their abilities.
- Experimental and investigative skills are acquired throughout the KS. Pupils are able to follow instructions and carry out experiments. They make accurate observations and measurements generally using appropriate units. Pupils can describe and record their results and the majority makes good use of graphical methods in analysis. Pupils carry out practical work safely.
- The quality and presentation of written work, including extended writing, is often good.
- The majority of pupils make good use of mathematical skills in scientific contexts.

KS4

- Many pupils build upon their KS3 achievements and have a good recall and understanding of topics covering life processes and living things, materials and their properties and physical processes.

- The most able can use their knowledge and understanding to solve scientific problems and make good and very good progress.
- Pupils with SEN, and those on the Freshstart programmes, make progress in line with their abilities.
- During the KS, pupils' experimental and investigative skills are further developed. The majority of pupils can use detailed scientific knowledge and understanding to plan and successfully carry out an investigation. They are aware of the need to control variables and to make fair comparisons. Pupils are able to make a range of appropriate observations and take accurate measurements.
- Data is often well used in detailed analysis and in making conclusions. The more able pupils are well able to link their conclusions to scientific theory and their predictions. They are able to make reasoned suggestions for improving their methods.
- Able and middle ability pupils reach good and sometimes very good standards in externally assessed practical work.
- Throughout KS3 and KS4 pupils gain in knowledge and awareness of the valuable contributions science makes to everyday life. They acquire an understanding of the social, economic, ethical and environmental aspects of the subject.

Sixth form

- Students generally have a good knowledge and understanding of a wide range of topics and key concepts in biology, chemistry and physics.
- They can successfully use their knowledge, understanding and skills in solving problems.
- Communication and mathematical skills are generally well used. Students research and organise information effectively, building up clear, comprehensive, well-kept files.
- Practical skills are good. Experiments are well planned, students work safely and systematically, they make appropriate observations and collect accurate data. Results are well analysed and interpreted using appropriate scientific theory.
- Most students make good progress.

Shortcomings

KS3 and KS4

- A significant minority of middle and lower ability pupils, especially at KS4, lack knowledge and understanding in key areas. They make slower progress, which is often hindered by absence, lack of study skills and negative attitudes to work.
- Pupils do not use ICT skills to capture, store and process information.
- In assessed practical work, many average and less able pupils' planning lacks scientific detail and preliminary work. Analyses and evaluations lack sufficient depth or are incomplete.

Sixth form

- A minority of students has a less secure knowledge and understanding of key facts, concepts and ideas.

Since the last inspection standards of achievement have improved.

Welsh second language

Standards of achievement in relation to pupils' abilities at KS3 and KS4 are satisfactory.

These standards are reflected in the examination results of the small cohorts of pupils who sit the GCSE Welsh Second Language examination.

Good features

KS3

- Pupils can express likes and dislikes, using correct and quite extended oral responses.
- Pupils can express opinions in Welsh on their part-time jobs and relate holiday experiences.
- Pupils' reading comprehension skills are developing well. Most pupils read with clarity and meaning and make good use of the Olwyn Darllen reading records.
- Abler pupils can write extended well-structured and correct written assignments. Abler Y9 pupils write extensively on a good range of topics. Most pupils write short dialogues and poems of a good quality.
- New differentiated teaching materials, created by the department are having a positive impact on pupils' language skills at KS3 and on the achievements of SEN pupils.

KS4

- Pupils' listening and reading comprehension skills are good throughout the ability range.
- Most pupils can ask and answer basic questions in Welsh on a range of topics, using teacher cues and prompts effectively.
- Most display satisfactory reading skills and read with correct intonation and pronunciation.
- GCSE coursework is satisfactory overall. Abler pupils' written tasks are of a good quality. They organize and structure their work effectively and some word process their assignments effectively.
- Pupils following the full GCSE course are making good progress in all language skills.

Shortcomings

KS3

- A minority of pupils do not provide correct oral responses in whole class situations.
- A minority of pupils of middle and lower ability do not read with sufficient clarity and meaning. Written work is sometimes limited to copying out language items.
- Most KS3 shortcomings are limited to Y8 pupils.

KS4

- A substantial minority of pupils across the ability range cannot provide suitably extended oral and written responses.
- Some abler pupils, following the GCSE short course do not build upon the standards achieved by the end of KS3.
- A minority of GCSE short course pupils make some basic pronunciation and spelling errors. In some cases, absences affect their progress.

Standards of achievement have been maintained since the last inspection and at KS4, all pupils follow a full or short course.

Design and technology

Standards of achievement are good in KS3 and 4 and in the sixth form.

Examination results reflect pupils' abilities and compare with local and national figures.

Good features

KS3 and KS4

- Pupils have a good understanding of the design process applying it well when developing their design and make tasks.
- They make use of research material, analyse problem tasks sensibly and generate a range of design ideas effectively.
- They formulate precise specifications that are helpful in guiding their designing and when evaluating their completed work.
- Written standards are generally good. Pupils understand and make use of technical vocabulary in discussions about their project development.
- Pupils can identify design features and can compare and analyse commercial products when solving design problems.
- Graphical and presentation skills are good. Drawings and sketches are supported by relevant annotation and a sensitive use of colour.
- Pupils design well and produce some valid modelling of their ideas.
- They experience and use a variety of materials in their project work, and show knowledge of a variety of skills and processes when designing and making.
- Practical skills and techniques are carried out safely and some well made items are produced.
- Pupils in all areas of design and technology are gaining valuable, relevant experiences in the use of a range of ICT applications when developing their projects. There are examples of good work in textiles, food and resistant materials in KS3.
- Pupils reflect and make objective judgements about their progress when developing their project work.
- Less able and SEN pupils are provided with positive opportunities for learning through freshstart and vocational initiatives. They receive helpful support and make good progress.
- Pupils participate well in whole class and group activities, and make good progress which is well monitored.
- Design folders and study guides are neatly presented and structured with well planned format and content.

Sixth form

- Designing skills are well focused. Students have a good understanding of design
- Research and analysis are broad, thorough and detailed. Students produce a varied range of valid ideas when developing design solutions.
- A good range of graphical work, modelling skills and experimentation with ideas within project studies.

- ICT applications are used appropriately, for research and in project development and presentation.
- Project tasks undertaken are innovative and challenging.
- Students experience and use a variety of materials.
- They show knowledge of a variety of skills and processes.
- There is positive independent working, with much problem solving and decision making.
- They set themselves good standards for their work, evaluate their progress objectively and make purposeful modifications to their ideas and products.

Shortcomings

KS3 and KS4

- Examples of incomplete work in pupils' folders both key stages.

Sixth form

- A small minority are complacent in their approach to designing, which hinders their progress.

Good progress has been made since the last inspection. The quality of designing and making continues to develop and improve. It now includes a broad use of a range of ICT applications across all aspects of DT which form an integral part of pupils' learning experience.

Information technology

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

KS4 and sixth form examination results reflect pupils' abilities and compare with local and national figures.

Good features

KS3 and KS4

- Written work is generally of a good standard with useful examples of drafting and re-drafting
- Oral work is clear and precise. Pupils show interest and confidence when explaining the development of project work.
- Most can identify problems, analyse information and generate solutions, which they can sensibly evaluate and modify.
- Pupils display positive skills, using the mouse/keyboard effectively when making use of icons, menus and functions
- They handle information, including number well, through the use of databases and spreadsheets. Completed work reflects different levels appropriate to their age and ability.
- There is developing strength in attainment in modelling and measuring. They can organise and combine information in various forms.
- Pupils show useful skills when using word processed text, often including graphical images imported from a variety of sources.

- They integrate software packages, making use of the internet and other sources of information well when completing their assignments.
- More able Y10 and 11 pupils can analyse a brief, identify requirements and plan out and construct a variety of valid responses.
- Pupils demonstrate a relevant approach and response to problem solving.
- All pupils, including those with SEN, make progress in lessons and demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and take some pride in their work.
- Pupils work well independently and collaboratively.
- Good facilities and expertise are now available for developing pupils' ICT skills.
- Pupils have the opportunity to access the ICT facility outside school hours and this extra provision is well supported.
- Pupils concentrate well, participate actively in lessons and are quick to seek help and advice.

Sixth form

- Students are responsive and motivated.
- They show confidence and capability in their work and generally demonstrate good standards of computer literacy.
- Relevant project work illustrates a sound balance between theoretical knowledge and the application of computing skills.
- There is useful evidence of experimentation and evaluation in work, with problem solving successfully undertaken.
- Active involvement in developing individual responses to tasks in organising, analysing and presenting information in a variety of forms.
- Students communicate ideas enthusiastically and generate a range of useful outcomes.
- The extra opportunity to access the ICT facility outside the timetable is well supported.

Shortcomings

KS3

- The sharing of computers slows the pace of progress for some pupils in larger classes.

Good progress has been made since the last inspection with a well structured KS3 provision and improving examination standards.

History

Standards of achievement are satisfactory in KS3 and KS4. Standards are good in Years 12 and 13. In 2002, 56% of the pupils who opted to study history at GCSE gained grades A*-C. In the AS level examinations held in 2002, 80% of the students entered gained grades A-C. In the 2002 A-level examinations at the end of Year 13, all students gained grades A-C.

Good features

KS3

- Pupils have secure levels of background knowledge and understanding; above average and most average ability pupils have good recall skills.

- They have good chronological awareness and show growing confidence in extracting accurate information from a variety of sources of historical evidence. Above average and most average ability pupils use the sources effectively to develop a more secure understanding of historical problems and to seek solutions that are appropriately based upon the evidence they examine.
- They successfully distinguish between fact and opinion and most can recognise bias in interpretations of historical events.
- They generally have a sound understanding of the operation of change in the historical process. Average and above average ability pupils are confident in identifying a variety of causes for change and many can distinguish between long-term and short-term factors making for change.
- A significant majority of pupils work collaboratively together and successfully develop an investigative approach to historical problems. By Y9, they produce pieces of extended writing and project work which are logically organised, cogently argued and carefully researched.
- Above average and some average ability pupils recognise that historical events can bear more than one interpretation. Their oral contributions in lessons are soundly argued and appropriately expressed.
- They can use subject-specific vocabulary accurately and in the correct context. They have a sound understanding of key words and key concepts in history.

KS4

- Pupils develop a secure understanding of how to test sources for bias, reliability and usefulness. They learn to compare sources effectively and can recognise and explain instances of bias in source material.
- They make further progress in developing an independent approach to investigating historical problems. They compile useful sets of notes for future reference and revision.
- A majority produce appropriately planned pieces of extended writing in a variety of styles; they draft and re-draft their work in order to raise their standards of achievement.

Sixth form

- Students produce well planned essays and presentations which provide good evidence of wide background reading, thorough research and careful organisation of their material. They ensure that the arguments they use are well analysed and that they are focused upon addressing the particular problems posed in the question. Their note-taking skills develop well and they record their learning in a variety of forms.
- A significant number have good knowledge and understanding of historical debates and they can synthesise the views of professional historians. They effectively compare and contrast the differing views found in historical debates.
- They examine a wide variety of source material with growing confidence; they produce well informed and insightful responses to the information they extract from the sources, and take great care to be accurate and well focused in their work.

Shortcomings

KS3 and KS4

- Below average and some average ability pupils make limited written and oral responses to tasks set in history; their work often lacks adequate range and depth.

- A number of pupils of average and below average ability do not always make sufficient effort to complete their homework and other set tasks; this hampers their ability to raise their standards of achievement.
- Standards of presentation of written work by a number of average and below average ability pupils fall below the expectations of the department in both key stages. Standards of spelling, punctuation and English expression are often insecure among this group of pupils.
- The unsatisfactory attendance of a significant number of pupils, especially in KS4, has a negative impact upon the standards achieved at the end of the key stage.

Good progress has been maintained since the last inspection.

Geography

Standards of achievement, relative to pupils' abilities, are good in all key stages. Results in external examinations are creditable with a 100% pass rate at both GCSE and A level.

Good features

KS3

- Pupils make good progress in acquiring the skills of geographical enquiry, benefiting from a programme of extra-curricular visits and making good use of information from primary and secondary sources.
- They increase their subject vocabulary of key words which they apply with increasing precision; their key learning skills of communication and numeracy are enhanced by regular opportunities to make use of them in classroom tasks.
- They show good knowledge and understanding of patterns and processes in physical and human aspects of the subject, gaining insight into the work of rivers and causes of flooding and into the growth of settlements both locally and in overseas countries.
- They describe and explain environmental change and how man's influence can affect regions such as the tropical rain forests of the world; they possess good understanding of factors which influence small and large scale migrations of peoples.

KS4

- Pupils make good use of previously acquired information and can apply it in a new context; they exhibit a wide range of geographical skills which they use constructively.
- They effectively link theory and practice in their work on named case studies; they use Welsh examples to develop and to apply their knowledge to the quality of life and standards of living in less economically developed countries.
- Others confidently discuss how changes in global climates and the effects of human influence can change the ecosystems and natural vegetation of a region.
- Pupils speak and write with increasing accuracy and can collect, represent and interpret data in maps and diagrams.

Sixth form

- Students manage a wide range of geographical information in different forms and from a range of sources including ICT; they possess a sound grasp of relevant specialist knowledge and its application.

- They competently discuss more complex issues such as sustainable development and draw on their knowledge and understanding of the connections between the different aspects of the subject; initial studies into global ecosystems show their ability to work productively as individuals and in a group.
- They make good use of contrasting case studies to exemplify their theoretical knowledge of aspects of change in the rural environment and how inequalities in urban areas can pose challenges to the inhabitants.

Shortcomings

KS3 and KS4

- In both KS3 and KS4, whilst achieving standards commensurate with their abilities, the progress of a small minority of pupils is restrained by a short span of concentration, a failure to recall information and an uncertainty in the use and meaning of subject terminology; absences also affect standards.
- Some pupils are more confident orally than in writing; others are sometimes reluctant to volunteer answers in class.
- Individual pupils experience location problems; others fail to utilise available evidence when asked to use a resource pack to answer past questions.

Standards have risen in recent years and the department has made good progress since the last inspection.

Modern foreign languages

Standards of achievement in French are satisfactory in KS3 and KS4. The language is not taught in the sixth form..

The very small proportion of the year group who entered GCSE examinations in 2002 all gained a grade A*- G. One pupil attained a grade A*-C.

Good features

KS3

- The majority of pupils understand their teacher and respond appropriately.
- They are keen to answer questions; the majority speaking with a good accent.
- They take part confidently in short, prepared role play dialogues.
- Pupils understand the main points in texts and read up to date magazines.
- In Y9 more able pupils write accurately and at length using a range of vocabulary.
- By the end of KS3 pupils with SEN make progress appropriate to their abilities.

KS4

- Pupils identify main points in conversations.
- Many speak at length on topics prepared for GCSE examinations.
- They read for gist and detail and use dictionaries effectively.
- In Y11 the majority of pupils write letters and descriptions with increasing grammatical accuracy.
- More able pupils produce written coursework of a high quality.

Shortcomings

KS3

- Pupils lack confidence when speaking with a stranger.
- The majority do not use French in normal classroom exchanges with the teacher and many have to be encouraged to speak in full sentences.
- For pupils of middle and lower ability, many written tasks are not sufficiently challenging; pupils confine themselves to short written answers.

KS4

- Pupils require repetition to identify details in French spoken at a natural pace.
- They are very hesitant in unrehearsed situations and do not use the language as the normal means of communication in the classroom..
- For a significant minority progress is hindered by absence.

Since the last inspection the department has made good progress. Standards have improved in both KS3 and KS4.

Art

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

The school enters a higher proportion of pupils for GCSE art than the national average. All pupils achieve grades A*-G, with girls achieving more of the higher grades. Results at grades A*-C are below the national average. These results at the higher grades do not reflect the overall good quality of work seen, but are due to the department's supportive policy of entering a significant number of under-performing pupils with poor attendance records, who in other circumstances would probably not have been considered. A level results are very good. All candidates were awarded grades A-C, with both male and female students achieving the higher grades over time.

Good features

KS3 and KS4

- Pupils make good progress in developing their observational drawing skills.
- They understand and use the essential elements of line, tone, pattern and texture well.
- They understand colour relationships and know how to create tones and tints.
- They are able to select and use a range of different materials.
- They understand how to use clay to express their ideas in three-dimensional forms.
- They understand how to use different artists' techniques to improve their own work.
- They are beginning to use sketchbooks successfully.
- Pupils are developing good research skills using ICT to find out about different artists.
- They can use craft printing techniques with skill.
- They develop good problem-solving skills in complex multi-colour printing exercises.
- They have a good understanding of the art and craft of Wales from local study visits.
- They are beginning to understand and appreciate the art of other cultures.
- Most are beginning to look at art and form personal opinions and judgements.

- Most are acquiring and using an appropriate art vocabulary.
- They are regularly involved in self-assessment and respond very well to the teachers' high expectations.
- SEN pupils make good progress in tasks that are amended for their needs.
- High attaining pupils are provided with demanding new tasks when working with a visiting artist.
- Pupils who are in danger of becoming disaffected with school are exceptionally well provided for.

Sixth form

- Students are developing as independent artists in work that shows much individual flair.
- Colour is understood particularly well and used with lots of vivacity.
- Sketchbook work successfully demonstrates an imaginative and experimental approach to art.
- Students are able to explore new techniques, such as photography.
- Their painting ranges from large bold expressive work to small and delicate studies.
- They broaden their range of expertise by working with training art teachers.
- They are extending their knowledge of historical art from visits to national art galleries.
- They know how to use ICT to research art and to present their writing.
- They gain an understanding of the role of the contemporary artist from working with, and writing to, Welsh artists.

Shortcomings

KS3 and KS4

- Pupils do not have experience of using computers to generate creative art.
- They do not keep technical notes in all craft activities.
- Their knowledge of the art of other cultures is limited by the small range covered.

Sixth form

- Students do not have experience of using computers to generate creative art.
- When writing, a few students do not sufficiently express their own thoughts or feelings.
- Their rehearsal of craft skill is limited by the lack of a designated workspace.

Good progress has been made since the previous report.

Music

Standards are satisfactory in KS3 and good in KS4 and the sixth form. GCSE results in recent years have fluctuated. In 2000 results were well above the national average. and, although below in 2001 and 2002, candidates, overall, gained better results in music than in their other subjects. Results were good at A level in 2001 and very good at AS level in 2002.

Good features

KS3

- Pupils sing with enthusiasm, clarity of diction and a pleasing tone. They perform various pieces individually on keyboards with a good degree of accuracy.

- A few rhythmic and melodic compositions have a sense of balance and structure and are musically interesting.
- Most pupils can identify instruments and basic features in different recorded extracts. A few more able pupils make perceptive comments when evaluating their own practical work.

KS4

- Pupils make suitable progress in vocal and instrumental performing and achieve good standards in individual and group performance.
- Many completed compositions and work in progress display good understanding of melody writing, chords and basic structures.
- More able pupils, using suitable musical terminology, discern technical and expressive features well when appraising music from different styles and periods.

Sixth form

- Y13 students are very able and confident performers; they achieve high standards. Y12 students make appropriate progress in performing in line with their ability.
- Y13 students achieve good standards in composing. There is a secure understanding of the techniques involved in Baroque style compositions and “free” compositions demonstrate flair and a good understanding of the chosen style and medium. Work in progress by a few Y12 students shows promise.
- Y13 students have good knowledge and understanding of their set-work and of the music being studied in their associated topic. Their aural perception skills are good. Background notes, produced by a few Y12 students for their coursework essays, reflect personal research.

KS4 pupils and a few sixth formers make suitable use of the department’s limited ICT facilities to load and store their compositions.

Shortcomings

KS3

- Progress in instrumental performance is sometimes slow and more able pupils are not always fully extended. Pupils are less secure in ensemble performance.
- The ability of pupils to improvise and explore different sound sources and combine them imaginatively is limited.
- Evaluations by many pupils when appraising are often superficial.

KS4

- A few Y11 pupils have yet to refine their compositions adequately.
- The aural skills of a few pupils are uneven; they are not always secure and confident when appraising.

Sixth form

- Several Y12 students find composing difficult and have yet to research and plan their coursework essays. Only limited progress has been made in both areas of study.
- Due to a lack of technical knowledge the aural skills of certain Y12 students are not always secure.

Instrumental tuition taken by 10% of the pupils on roll, together with numerous extra-curricular groups of good quality and regular successful musical productions, complement the work of the department. These make a worthwhile contribution to the life of the school and the community.

Since the last inspection, whereas there has not been a significant improvement in standards at KS3, standards in KS4 and the sixth form have been consolidated.

Physical education

Standards of achievement at KS3 are satisfactory. KS4 standards are satisfactory overall and often good. Standards post-16 are generally good and on occasion very good.

While GCSE results still fall short of corresponding national results, performance post-16 compares well. GCSE cohorts are large and many low ability pupils achieve particularly well.

Good features

KS3

- Pupils repeat, practise and refine their activities, especially in gymnastics and ball skills. They show accuracy and control in passing and dribbling.
- Pupils work very well with a partner or in a group to plan and to practise.
- Many are able to comment constructively on their own and others' work.
- In basketball, they anticipate well and make good use of space.
- Pupils have good recall of previous work and tackle new work with confidence.

KS4

- Pupils pay good attention when practising and repeating activities and make good progress.
- They show a good range and variety of movements, strokes and strategies in badminton, swimming and dance, working very well with a partner or in groups.
- Pupils are willing to plan ahead, they make sensible choices and decisions for themselves and adapt well to new situations.
- Most have a good knowledge of the rules in football and basketball.
- They have a good understanding of health related fitness and in most lessons take time to warm up and cool down appropriately using their own routines or contributing to those of the group.
- Many, and especially those taking GCSE, make perceptive evaluations of their own and others' work and put these into practice.
- In swimming, pupils develop survival and lifesaving skills successfully and show perseverance and initiative.
- All listen well to instructions and carry them out as required.

Sixth form

- Students show a good understanding of the theories and ideas presented.
- They have good recall of previous work and relate it well to current work.

- Presentation of work is good and sometimes very good, using a range of ICT skills to good effect.
- They show very high levels of commitment and enthusiasm.
- They offer solutions to problems and draw on their own experiences well, demonstrating good use and understanding of technical vocabulary.
- Many are developing self-confidence and coaching skills to a very good standard with a mature and sensible attitude to their work.

Shortcomings

KS3

- In gymnastics and basketball there is limited body awareness leading to poor footwork and body tension.
- In some instances, especially with lower ability pupils, insufficient attention is given to applying evaluative information.
- In a few instances, pupils' range of skills is limited and does not progress.

KS4

- Skills practised deteriorate significantly in a game situation, especially footwork.
- Pupils not taking part are not involved in learning.

Sixth form

- There are no significant shortcomings though oral contributions are limited in scope and depth and pupils lack breadth of experience on which to draw.

A broad range of activities is offered to pupils in all key stages, within which girls in KS3 and post-16 have significantly reduced options.

Extra-curricular provision is often good with significant numbers taking part regularly in competitive sports. A number of pupils compete successfully at a higher level. There is good support for examination classes. Provision for girls, post-16 non-examination pupils and non-competitive sporting activities is less good. The faculty is to be commended for its international links and many other good links with schools, leisure facilities, clubs and coaching schemes which benefit a large number of pupils.

Since the last report good standards of planning, organisation, and assessment have been maintained and standards of achievement have improved.

Religious education

Standards achieved are satisfactory in KS3 and 4. All Y11 pupils follow the short course in religious education and about 40% were entered for the examination in 2002. 37% achieved grade A*-C. In relation to pupils' abilities, this is at least satisfactory.

Good features

KS3

- Pupils develop a wide knowledge of the beliefs and practices of a number of religions, especially Christianity.
- Across the ability range, pupils can recognise various technical terms in religion and are able to explain their meaning orally and in their written work.
- Many can offer clear interpretations of religious symbols and relate them to the key elements of belief.
- Pupils understand why believers celebrate their faith and how religious beliefs shape the lives of individuals and communities.
- Many are willing to give their own opinions clearly and concisely, demonstrating skills of interpretation and empathy.

KS4

- All pupils have the opportunity to sit the GCSE short course.
- They can relate religious belief and practice to contemporary issues and their own experiences.
- They have a good knowledge and understanding of current moral and social issues.
- They recognise the right and wrong in specific situations when discussing topics such as euthanasia, discrimination and responsibility.
- In paired and group work they are honest and on the basis of their knowledge they can form an opinion, whilst giving due respect to the opinions of others.

Shortcomings

- Absenteeism affects the progress of students.
- Progress is limited at KS3 because of the limited time provided.
- Pupils do not often produce extended written work on moral issues.

Religious studies

- Standards of achievement at KS4 and the sixth form A2 courses are good. There is no AS course this year. In 2002, 55% of GCSE pupils gained the higher grades A*-C. This is higher than the school average but below national figures. At AS level in 2002, 63% gained A-C and 88% gained A-E grades. The results of the AS examinations were good and all eight students have continued with the course at A2.

Good features

KS4

- Pupils have a good factual knowledge and understanding of Judaism. They recognise the importance of religious beliefs in the face of persecution and how it shapes the identity of its adherers and the religion.
- Across the ability range pupils can recognise technical terms in religion and can explain their meaning both orally and in their written work.
- Pupils are able to discuss the attitudes of prejudice towards the Jews and make mature judgements as to the questions and issues raised by human experience.

Sixth form

- Students have a good understanding of the doctrines of the various factions within the Corinthian Church as exposed by St. Paul.
- They have a secure knowledge of religious terminology and deal confidently with different texts.
- In their written work, the majority can analyse and present factual information and ideas in an organised manner.

Shortcomings

- In some cases in KS4 pupils' beliefs and opinions expressed orally are not produced sufficiently in their writing that tends to be rather superficial.
- There is a tendency to be over-dependent on notes prepared by the teacher.
- Y13 students are reluctant to volunteer extended verbal responses.

The department has made good progress since the last inspection.

Personal and social development

Standards of achievement are satisfactory overall.

Good features

- The majority of pupils listen attentively to others and to audio-visual resources and respond appropriately.
- When the opportunity arises, pupils can use computers with confidence to research topics.
- They work well as individuals, in pairs and in groups showing good levels of collaboration.
- They can explain their ideas to others in a positive manner and can frame their own questions.
- Most pupils can generate and participate in discussion.
- In Y7, pupils are made aware of personal development and hygiene, personal safety and helping others.
- Y8 pupils understand the influences in their lives and are made aware of the consequences of the misuse of substances such as drugs.
- Y9 pupils have their first contact with careers and guidance and have been introduced to progress files.
- Y10 pupils became aware of a variety of occupations and are prepared for work experience.
- In Y11, key skills, study skills and effective use of time are explored in preparation for examinations and pupils are introduced to writing their curriculum vitae and to interviews.
- The ASDAN key steps award in KS3 and key decisions award in KS4.
- Sixth form students are encouraged to appraise themselves and to research their career aspirations.

Shortcomings

- A small minority of pupils in KS3 and KS4 are inattentive and show little interest in the pastoral and guidance programme as a whole.
- At times, pupils rush to answer before they have fully understood the question and do not reason out the answer.

Since the last inspection, the effective programme of PSE has been updated and the delivery is being systematically changed from being form tutor based to teachers presenting a module to all pupils within a year.

Business studies

Standards of achievement are good. GCSE examination results show positive progress grades for most pupils, particularly girls whose results at A*-C were well above national figures.

Good features

- Pupils display a good knowledge and understanding of the different aims, objectives, ownership and sources of funding for business organisations.
- They use business terms well when discussing and explaining their work on market research techniques and methods of production.
- They have a good understanding of factors that affect the location of business and industry and can justify the choice of location for their business enterprise.
- Pupils are aware of channels of communication that exist within and between businesses and are able to assess the suitability of methods used in different circumstances.
- They can apply what they know to solve business problems in a real life context at an appropriate level.
- Pupils can identify and evaluate constructively the methods used by local and national companies to promote and advertise their products.

Shortcomings

- Average and less able pupils have a less secure understanding of the importance of financial and budgetary control.
- Absence affects standards in a minority of instances.

There has been good progress since the last inspection.

Drama

Standards of achievement are good at KS3 and very good at KS4.

Good features

KS3

- Pupils are developing their understanding of stage angles and sightlines and make good use of space.
- They listen attentively to teacher inputs and peers' evaluations.
- They can evaluate performances, using appropriate language and key words effectively.
- Most display mature sophisticated performing skills.
- By the end of the key stage, pupils can refine their sound collages and layering techniques and are confident in refining their performances.

KS4

- Pupils can demonstrate a wide range of moods, emotions and gestures.
- They have developed a good awareness of rehearsal process and audience perspective.
- Pupils of all abilities can work independently in pairs and groups to interpret and develop teacher stimuli.
- They are developing a mature, critical, personal voice in their course work assignments and quote effectively from set texts.
- Most pupils produce thoughtful, poignant and well structured written tasks in line with examination guidelines.
- Some pupils access relevant website information to improve their knowledge base.

Shortcomings

KS3

- A minority of Y7 pupils are not consistent, attentive listeners. They do not use appropriate movement and gesture to exemplify characters.

The department has developed and made good progress since the last inspection. The first, small cohort will enter GCSE in 2004.

Economics and Business

Standards are good. Students achieved good A level results with all students gaining at least a grade E and over half gaining A – C grades.

Good features

- Students develop an appropriate understanding of economic and business concepts and theories and the ability to apply them to real world issues.
- They can explain internal and external factors that influence business activity and can assess how they will affect business behaviour.
- They are well informed about global economic issues and use the information intelligently to deepen their understanding of the local and national economy.
- They can explain in detail how businesses operate in a competitive market and fully understand the importance of competitiveness for survival.
- Diagrams are accurately drawn and well integrated to support their work on demand and supply.

- Most can select and present relevant factual information, ideas and arguments in an organised and logical way as demonstrated by their work on efficiency.

Shortcomings

- A few students provide a brief analysis in their written work and do not always address the questions posed.

This course was not part of the curriculum at the time of the last inspection.

Law

Standards of achievement are good in Years 12 and 13. In the 2002 AS examinations all students gained grades A-C. At A level, 82% gained A/B grades.

Good features

- Students have good levels of knowledge and understanding of legal principles and can apply their knowledge to a range of cases and problems. They have a thorough knowledge of the English court system and a good understanding of the differences between criminal and civil law.
- Good use is made of legal terminology which is applied in the correct context. They demonstrate a good ability to think independently and can use their knowledge systematically and effectively to build up and argue a case.
- They have good levels of knowledge and understanding of the operation of the Crown Prosecution Service and can make sensible suggestions for reforms which would lead to a more efficient criminal justice system. They are well informed about the Jury system and about the operation of the Bail Act in a variety of different situations. By Year 13, they have a secure understanding of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act and show a good awareness of current debates in this area.
- They have a good working knowledge of the European Convention on Human Rights and of the Human Rights Act of 1998. In particular, they develop intelligent and thoughtful discussions about the implications of current thinking and contemporary circumstances in relation to Human Rights in Britain and abroad.
- They have a good working knowledge of relevant statute and case law and can accurately pinpoint the legal implications of a legal problem. When constructing a written presentation, they can successfully cite appropriate cases and precedents to strengthen their arguments, showing a good mastery of the main legal issues.
- They develop their speculative skills successfully in their consideration of the links between law, morality and justice.
- They make good use of a variety of research techniques to further their knowledge and understanding. They use a wide variety of sources of information, such as government legal reports, to ensure that their knowledge is up-to-date; good note-taking skills and regular use of the information on the internet further promote their progress.

Vocational education

Applied Business

Standards of achievement are good.

Good features

- Pupils acquire a secure knowledge and understanding of the different types of business organisations, the markets they serve and the way they operate to produce goods and services.
- They understand the aims and objectives of business and are developing an awareness of the criteria for judging success.
- They can link their classwork with realistic business and industrial situations as demonstrated by their work on business location.
- They can distinguish between different roles in the work place and understand and can explain clearly the responsibilities and rights of employers and workers.
- They can recall, discuss and explain recent work and make good progress in understanding business activity in the different industrial sectors.

Shortcomings

- A minority of pupils have difficulty interpreting and analysing information independently.

This subject did not feature in the previous inspection having been introduced in September 2002.

Business (AVCE)

Standards of achievement are consistently good.

Good features

- Students have a good understanding of their work on marketing and are fully aware of the ethical, environmental, social and legal constraints placed on marketing activities.
- They appreciate the ways in which developments in modern technology have affected the operation of businesses and can evaluate, for example, their impact on communication and production.
- They make effective use of personal experiences and knowledge gained from visits and visitors to consolidate and extend their understanding of the local economy.
- Students display a very good understanding of topics such as human resource management and customer services.
- They are active learners and engage well in dialogue with their teachers. The standard of their written and oral explanations is good.
- Students can analyse numerical data and interpret graphical information successfully. They are competent using ICT skills to research, communicate and analyse information.

Shortcomings

- A few students do not always link information gathered to the business being investigated.

This course was not reported on in the previous inspection.

Others

Leisure and tourism - Intermediate, Y12.

Standards of achievement, relative to students' abilities, are good. Last year, all those who completed the course gained a certificate.

Good features

- Students make appropriate progress in developing knowledge of the vocational area and demonstrate a satisfactory understanding of past and current work; they appreciate that leisure is one of the fastest growing industries in the UK.
- They make good use of the local community as a first-hand source of evidence with planned visits to facilities such as Llancaiach Fawr, the Dan yr Ogorf Caves and Oakdale; they make progress in the process skills of planning and investigation in their consideration of sites for a new leisure centre.
- They work productively as individuals and as a group and accept responsibility for their own learning; they access relevant information from a wide range of sources and show maintained progress in communication, numeracy and the use of computers.
- They recognise the importance of good customer service to different types of customers who often pay for services and expect to be treated well; they use their own experiences to consolidate their findings.

Shortcomings

- Individuals download and present information directly from the source rather than re-arranging or using their own words; assignments occasionally lack sufficient detail.

The subject was not taught at the time of the last inspection.

Health and social care

Standards are good at KS4 and in the sixth form. Recent examination results are satisfactory at GNVQ and good at Advanced level.

GCSE

The school has recently introduced this course into the KS4 curriculum.

Good features

- Pupils demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of statutory and voluntary health care provision.
- They are able to identify a range of care settings and describe the role of professional carers.
- Pupils research effectively into client groups and record detailed evidence of individual health and lifestyle conditions in their case study assignments.
- Investigation into community services is carried out well and pupils are able to identify the purpose of each.
- Pupils display competent ICT skills. They use facilities well to access internet websites and enhance the visual impact of information leaflets.

Shortcomings

- A minority of pupils are less focused and quite teacher reliant in completing their tasks.
- Inaccuracies of spelling mar the presentation of a minority of work.

GNVQ – Intermediate and Foundation

Good features

- Pupils are developing a sound understanding of the structure and function of health care services and the role of professional carers, with good emphasis on local provision.
- They can identify causes of disability and barriers to access of services in the workplace and the community.
- They demonstrate good knowledge of different life stages and factors that affect personal development.
- Investigative and research skills are well utilised to study individual clients. Pupils are able to identify potential risks to health and record meaningful health plans for improving diet and lifestyle.
- Many pupils are able to discuss issues confidently in class discussions.
- Numeracy skills are well used to calculate dietary intake.
- ICT is used well for a variety of purposes.

Shortcomings

- A minority of pupils are passive in discussion sessions
- Not all pupils are able to recall information independently.

Good progress has been made since the last inspection.

Advanced

Good features

- Students have good knowledge and understanding of the key concepts of health and social care and clients rights.

- They can research independently and can extract and record relevant data from a variety of sources.
- Investigative work is well undertaken and students carry out in depth analysis of statutory provision within the locality.
- They utilise first hand information from visits and placements in their work.
- Students discuss issues confidently and use appropriate health and social care terminology.
- ICT is used competently to access up to date material and to enhance the presentation of their work.

Shortcomings

- The depth and quality varies in a minority of work.

This level was not offered at the time of the last inspection.

Early Years

This progression award leads to a vocational qualification and is being studied by a very small number of Year 12 students. Standards of achievement are good.

Good features

- Students acquire sound knowledge and understanding of child care settings and the role of professionals working with young children.
- They experience first hand work structures via regular placements in nursery and infant schools.
- Students research a range of issues relating to the care and upbringing of children and show good awareness of cultural influences.
- Investigative work is well focused and often presented visually in the form of information leaflets.
- There is good depth to written work and both students are on target to complete the course successfully.
- ICT is well used for researching internet web sites and for presenting written and graphical work.

Shortcomings

- The spell check facility is not always used.
- Due to the low numbers, students do not develop meaningful discussion skills.

This course was not studied at the time of the last inspection.

GNVQ Manufacturing (Foundation)

Standards of achievement are satisfactory.

- Most pupils show confidence when discussing and explaining their work and make useful progress in understanding issues relating to their area of study.
- Pupils have a developing awareness and understanding of the theoretical and practical elements and make appropriate use of a number of ICT applications to support their studies.
- Assignment work shows positive developments, with a thorough approach to planning, generation of ideas and relevant investigative study.
- Pupils' work is generally well presented, report writing is organised and mostly accurate in content and supported by a sensible use of graphical material and commercial information
- Pupils make sound attempts at sketching and in using formal drawing techniques.
- There is enthusiasm for the development of personal designing and making skills
- Pupils interact purposefully in small group situations

8. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

8.1 Progress since the last inspection

1. *To persist in efforts to improve pupils' attendance.*

Varied and sustained strategies have been adopted to improve attendance, with considerable success. Attendance, nevertheless stubbornly remains below 90% and is unsatisfactory.

2. *To improve pupils' competence in all aspects of the use of English and especially their capability in speaking and discussion.*

Spoken language and numeracy group (SLaNG) documents outline focus for improvements and for expectations within subjects. Satisfactory and ongoing progress has been made. Particularly successful has been the fresh start initiative for KS4.

3. *To monitor the attainment of boys.*

The school is data rich. Careful monitoring and mentoring takes place. Girls' attainments overall outperform those of the boys.

4. *To implement as planned the arrangements for the education of pupils with special educational needs (SEN), paying particular attention to the range of activities provided and to the nature and levels of in-class support.*

Substantial progress has been made in improving arrangements, provision and activities for SEN pupils in KS4. However, the position in KS3 has not been fully addressed. No additional support is available in mainstream

5. *To improve the quality of the PE facilities and to deal with matters of health and safety identified in the report.*

Health and safety matters have been addressed. PE facilities have been the subject of extensive refurbishment, but are now showing their age. Plans have been approved for ambitious redevelopments.

6. *To improve the quality and use of the school library.*

The library has been appropriately re-housed and includes a 14-station ICT resource. Book stock is low. There is no librarian and the library is underdeveloped as a whole school resource.

7. *To exploit more effectively information technology across the curriculum.*

The school has invested heavily in ICT and has a very good pupil : computer ratio and range of computer suites. This development has been so successful that these rooms are heavily used for discrete ICT. Other subjects, with few computers, who wish to use the suites for whole classes, have difficulty, therefore, in gaining access. There is no booking or coordinating link.

8. *To comply with statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship.*

Assemblies are of good quality. Very thought provoking ‘thoughts for the week’ are provided for use in discussion on days when classes do not have formal assembly. They are inconsistently used in registration, which rarely includes a prayer.

8.2 Key issues for action

Against a mainly positive picture of school improvement, to raise further the standard of work and quality of provision of education, the headteacher, staff and governors should:

- maintain the school’s distinctive individual features and ethos,
- raise standards of achievement in those subjects identified as satisfactory in the report,
- intensify, extend and monitor carefully the range of approaches already adopted by the school to raise pupils’ basic levels of literacy and numeracy on entry,
- build on the improvements to date, to reinforce the culture of good attendance further,
- develop the potential of the library as a whole-school resource and arrangements to enable subjects to book ICT resources,
- as circumstances allow, consider the level of provision of in-class support in low ability KS3 classes,
- address the health and safety issues identified to the school, and
- comply with statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship and for provision of religious education in the sixth form.

Acknowledgement

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

APPENDIX

A. Basic information about the school

Name of School	Pen y dre High School
School type	Comprehensive
Age -range of pupils	11-18 years
Address of school	Gurnos Merthyr Tydfil
Post-Code	CF47 9BY
Telephone Number	01685 721726

Headteacher	Mr J Williams CBE
Date of appointment	September 1993
Chair of Governors/ Appropriate Authority	Mr J Amos
Registered Inspector	Mr JE James
Dates of inspection	10 March 2003

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	154	179	186	188	199	66	70	1042

<i>Total number of teachers</i>			
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time equivalent (fte)
Number of teachers	64	2	65

<i>Staffing information</i>	
Pupil:teacher (fte) ratio (excluding special classes)	16 :1
Average teaching group size	21.6
Overall contact ratio	75.9 %

<i>Percentage attendance for three complete terms prior to the inspection</i>								
	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13	Whole school
Autumn 2002	90	90	89	90	83	76	65	83
Summer 2002	90	90	87	88	86	57	59	80
Spring 2002	90	90	88	88	80	72	65	82

Percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals	40%
Number of pupils excluded during 12 months prior to inspection	27

C. Results of National Curriculum assessments and public examinations

National Curriculum Assessment KS3 results: 2002															
Total number of pupils in Y9: 190															
Percentage of pupils at each level															
			D	A	F	W	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	EP
EN	Teacher assessment	School							17	26	32	18	6		
		National		1				2	9	22	34	21	8		
MA	Test	School		10	5.8				14	27	26	11	2		
		National		2	0.3	1	0.5	6	11	29	31	14	5		
	Teacher assessment	School							13	30	30	21	6		
		National		1				1	10	23	25	26	13		
	Test	School		10	3				10	24	25	22	7		
		National		1	0.3	0.6	0.1	1	14	26	25	23	9		
SC	Teacher assessment	School							16	11	32	35	6		
		National		1	1			1	10	24	31	23	9		
	Test	School		9	2				10	22	33	19	6		
		National		3	0.1	0.5		0.6	12	28	29	21	6		

Percentage of pupils attaining at least level 5 in mathematics, science and either English or Welsh (first language)			
by Teacher Assessment		by Test	
In the school:	30	In the school:	31
In Wales:	52	In Wales:	53

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

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

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

W - Pupils who are working towards level 1

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

For pupils aged 15, results in GCSE, CoE, GNVQ and NVQ			
Number of pupils aged 15 on the school roll in January 2002: 209			
The percentage of 15 year old pupils who in 2002:			
	School	UA	Wales
Were entered for 5 or more GCSEs	74	80	86
achieved 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C	23	35	50
achieved 5 or more GCSE grades A*-G	67	76	85
achieved GCSE grades A*-C in each of mathematics, science, English or Welsh first language)	21	28	37
entered at least one CoE, GCSE short course or GCSE	96	97	97
achieved one or more GCSE grades A*-C	49	61	74
achieved one or more GCSE grades A*-G	86	89	92
achieved no graded GCSE	8	11	8
achieved one or more CoE only	2	3	3
achieved a GNVQ Part 1, a GNVQ at Foundation level or NVQ level 1	10		
achieved a GNVQ Part 1, a GNVQ at Intermediate level or NVQ level 2	7		
achieved at least 5 GCSE grades A* to C, the equivalent vocational qualifications or a combination of both	4		
achieved at least 5 GCSE grades A* to G, the equivalent vocational qualifications or a combination of both	15		

For pupils aged 16, 17 and 18, results in A/AS, GNVQs and NVQs			
Number of pupils aged 16, 17 and 18 in January 2002: 181			
Number of pupils entered for 2 or more GCE A level examinations or equivalent in 2002:36			
Number of pupils entered for fewer than 2 GCE A levels or equivalent in 2002:10			
	School	UA	Wales
Percentage of pupils entered who achieved 2 or more grades A-C	64	61	66
Percentage of pupils entered who achieved 2 or more grades A-E	94	95	94
Average points score per candidate	16	17	20
Number of pupils who achieved a GNVQ Intermediate or NVQ at level 2	4		
Number of pupils who achieved a GNVQ Advanced or NVQ at level 3	8		

D. The evidence base of the inspection

The school was inspected by a team of 19 inspectors, who spent 57 inspection days in school collecting evidence and inspecting all subjects. Inspectors observed 250 lessons in full or in part. All teachers present were seen teaching, most on a number of occasions. Planned discussions were held with the majority of teachers, including members of the leadership team and year and subject heads, with non-teaching staff, support workers and the chairman and members of the governing body. In addition, there were informal discussions with both teaching and non-teaching staff, and an informal lunchtime meeting was held, to which governors, members of the local community, and many professional and visiting agencies to the school were invited. In a meeting with the registered inspector, members of the governing body discussed their role in action which had been taken since the previous inspection.

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

The school helpfully provided an extensive range of informative documents which was analysed before and during the inspection. The inspection team carefully considered 97 responses made by parents to questionnaires distributed before the inspection and the comments by the parents at the pre-inspection meeting conducted by the registered inspector.

E. Composition and responsibilities of the inspection team

Team member	Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
JE James Registered Inspector	English, support drama	Context; main findings; standards achieved in subjects and areas of learning; standards achieved in key skills across the curriculum; quality of teaching; quality of self-evaluation and planning for improvement; leadership and efficiency; resources; progress since the last inspection; key issues for action
Dr MHL Snow Lay Inspector		Behaviour and attitudes; attendance; partnership with parents and community, schools and other institutions; partnership with industry
ATF Woods Core Team	Science coordinator (chemistry)	Assessment, recording and reporting; staffing; 6 th form coordination
AV Edwards Core Team	Mathematics, PSE coordinator	Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education
E Bowyer Core Team	Geography, leisure and tourism, GNVQ coordinator	Curriculum; support leadership and efficiency; accommodation
JBZ Davies	Welsh, drama	
SG Davies	Science (physics)	
H Evans		Support, guidance and pupils' welfare; special educational needs
Dr P Evans	Science (biology)	
E Forster	Art	
ME Herbert	Design and technology, health and social care, early years care and education	
W Heron	Physical education, leisure and recreation	
G Holland	Modern foreign languages	
AW Jones	Music	
A Newman	History, law	
R Newsome	Religious education/studies	
ME Page	English support	
Dr JK Watson	Design and technology coordinator, information technology, manufacturing, computing	
D Williams	Business studies, business, applied business, economics and business	