

**REPORT**

**on the**

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

**RHYMNEY COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL  
ABERTYSSWG  
RHYMNEY  
NP22 5XF**

School Number: 676/4090

Date of Inspection: 27th - 31st January 2003

**By**

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Registered Inspector 17193

Under Estyn contract number: T/17/02

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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**

Rhymney is an 11-18 co-educational comprehensive school situated in a green field site in Abertyswg. The upper school was opened there in 1983 with the lower school relocated there in 1990. At the time, four temporary classrooms were provided but 18 more have been added to cope with increasing numbers of pupils. The school population has increased from 630 in 1988 to around 790 at present, of which 74 are in the sixth-form. The school is looking to provide sufficient accommodation for growth to about 900 pupils in the year 2005, when county reorganisation proposals are due to take effect.

The school serves a group of villages and hamlets in the northern reaches of the Rhymney Valley: Abertyswg, Butetown, Fochriw, Pontlloyn, Princetown, Rhymney, Tirphil and New Tredegar. Almost all pupils speak English as their first language and in the school's catchment area fewer than 7 per cent of the community speak Welsh.

There are few opportunities for full-time employment locally but the community is the centre of a range of regeneration and renewal strategies, co-ordinated by the Rhymney Communities First Partnership Board, of which the headteacher is the current Chairman. As confidence in the community increases, companies such as the Community Furniture Enterprise and organisations such as The Prince's Trust are setting up in the town of Rhymney. The school is also working in partnership with the local FE college to develop a single post-16 education and training institution to serve all residents of the upper Rhymney Valley, and beyond.

The full range of ability is represented in the school. About 10 per cent of pupils come from families with a professional, managerial or technical background and 28 per cent of pupils are entitled to free school meals.

The school aims to provide pupils with a challenging education which promotes learning, raises standards and ensures they are properly prepared for adult life. The development plan outlines a number of objectives the school proposes to achieve over a two-three year period. The development plan includes specific targets relating to the development of key skills, pupil support, attendance and the development of vocational courses. Additionally the school is focusing particular attention on raising standards of achievement so that over 40% per cent of pupils achieve five grades A\* - C in the GCSE and attendance levels are increased above the current level of 90 per cent.

The school has a reputation for innovative work in many areas of its provision. It is currently completing a Safe Routes to School project, is part of the Healthy Schools Initiative, has just won the Basic Skills Quality Mark and been awarded Investors in People status. The school developed LEA pilots for the new Special Needs Code of Practice and the toolkit for Gifted and Talented pupils, due to be implemented from February 2003. The school is one of only three in Wales trialling the new Applied Science GCSE. Because of its reputation locally, the school is currently oversubscribed in all year groups.

## **2. MAIN FINDINGS**

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

- Rhymney Comprehensive School is a good school that has improved significantly since the last inspection took place in 1996. One of its main strengths is the respect that all members of the school community demonstrate for each other.

### **Educational standards achieved by pupils**

- The standards achieved by pupils are never less than satisfactory and they are good or better in 64% of classes. This is an improvement on the standards reported at the last inspection. The school exceeds the targets set by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2002 for standards of achievement to be satisfactory in 95% of classes and good in 50%. Very good standards are achieved in 8% of classes and these are found across all year groups except Y11 and Y13. The highest proportion of good and very good classes is found in the sixth-form (78%) and the lowest in key stage 4 (KS4) (57%).
- The percentage of pupils achieving level 5 or above in National Curriculum (NC) tests at the end of key stage 3 (KS3) has improved annually since 1998 and the rate of improvement is such that results are moving closer to national norms each year.
- The percentage of pupils gaining level 5 or above in all three core subjects, the core subject indicator (CSI) in 2002 was 43.3% which was on a par with the Unitary Authority (UA) average and below the Wales figure of 50.2%. This represents a marked improvement over the previous years.
- There has also been significant improvement in performance at GCSE. In 1996, 27% of pupils achieved 5 or more GCSE grade A\*-C, which increased to 37% in 2002. Boys did better than girls and their result was above the UA average.
- Achievement in the CSI at GCSE shows continuous improvement and was 28% in 2002.
- At advanced level (A level) or advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE), 51% of pupils gained 2 or more A-C grades. Boys did better than girls and they did well in comparison to UA and Wales averages. Students gained an average points score of 17, and boys outperformed girls and exceeded UA and Wales averages.
- Pupils' listening skills are well developed and standards are good across the curriculum.
- Most pupils are confident speakers, whether posing or answering questions and they communicate effectively.
- Reading skills are good overall.
- Almost all work is well presented but there is a wider variety of standards in writing than in other literacy skills. Grammar is satisfactory.
- Standards in numeracy across the curriculum are good overall.
- Standards of achievement in information communication technology (ICT) skills across the curriculum are satisfactory.

## Standards achieved in subjects

Subject	Key Stage 3	Key Stage 4	Sixth-form
English	Good	Good	Good
Mathematics	Good	Good	Good
Science	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	-
Biology	-	-	Good
Chemistry	-	-	Satisfactory
Physics	-	-	Satisfactory
Welsh	Good	Good	Good
Design and technology (DT)	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Information technology (IT)	Good	Good	Good
History	Good	Good	Good
Geography	Good	Satisfactory	Good
Modern foreign languages (MFL)	Good	Good	-
Art	Good	Good	Good
Music	Good	Good	-
Physical education (PE)	Good	Good	-
Physical education(GCSE/A Level)	-	Satisfactory	No judgement
Religious education (RE)	Good	Good	-
Religious studies (RS)	-	Good	-
Personal social & health education	Good	Good	No judgement
Business studies	-	-	Good
Food Studies	-	Satisfactory	-
Health and social care GCSE	-	Good	
Health and social care (Int)	-	-	Satisfactory
Health and social care (Advanced )	-	-	Good

### Shortcomings

- A significant minority of pupils is held back by poor reading skills.
- Although pupils generally take care in their work, many common errors in punctuation and spelling persist.

### Ethos of the school

- The provision for pupils' spiritual and cultural development is good and provision for moral and social development is very good.
- The effectiveness of the provision for spiritual development is shown in the ethos of the school, which is permeated by a sense of respect. The spiritual development of pupils is consciously fostered across much of the curriculum.
- Pupils are taught within a sound moral framework in which their sense of right and wrong is developed.
- Pupils usually participate in only one assembly per week and few form tutors follow up the assembly themes.
- Pupils have particular opportunities to develop responsibility and their understanding of being part of a wider community through the school's commitment to an extensive range of community service and charity work that continues throughout the year.

- Many subjects make good use of the culture of other countries to enrich pupils' cultural development.
- Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig is well developed.
- The standard of behaviour throughout the school is very good.
- In the first part of this school year overall attendance was 90%, which is satisfactory. For the school this attendance figure marks a milestone in the highly significant, extremely impressive and continuing improvement in attendance since the last inspection.

#### Shortcomings

- The school is failing to comply with the requirement for a daily act of worship for all pupils.

#### Quality of education

- The standard of teaching in the school is never less than satisfactory, and it is good or better in 71 % of classes. In 10% of classes teaching is very good. This is an improvement on the 1996 inspection.
- Teaching is at its best in the sixth-form where 89% of lessons are good or better. At KS3 and KS4 this standard is to be found in 71 % and 63% of classes respectively. Teaching is good in nearly all subjects across the curriculum.
- Both the knowledge and understanding of teachers are good or very good in all subjects.
- The quality of planning by teachers is good in most subjects.
- The pace and challenge of lessons are always at least satisfactory and are good in many subjects.
- The match of teaching to the ability of all pupils is good in about half of all subjects; in the others it is satisfactory.
- In all classes the high quality of relationships between pupils and between teachers and pupils is a major factor contributing to standards of learning and teaching.
- The quality of assessment, recording and reporting of pupils' achievement is satisfactory.
- In November 2002, the school adopted a new Assessment for Learning. There has not been sufficient time since its introduction to gauge the impact of this new policy.
- Pupils' work is marked regularly in most departments.
- Departmental records are generally complete and accurate and detailed central records are maintained with all assessment marks.
- There is good practice in some subjects, where personal pupil interviews are conducted to review progress and agree targets.
- The school meets statutory requirements for reporting to parents.
- All the departments receive a great deal of helpful statistical data from an assistant head and are encouraged to use that data in a constructive way.
- The quality, breadth and balance of the curriculum for pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs (SEN) are satisfactory in all key stages.
- In the sixth-form, the school has appropriately reduced the A/AS programme to 13 subjects in order to support the literacy initiative in KS3.
- The planning for the development of key skills at KS3 and KS4 is good, and it is satisfactory in the sixth-form.
- The arrangements for teaching personal, social and health education (PSHE) are very good.
- There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities.

- The quality of support and guidance and procedures for promoting pupils' welfare are good and the school has a very effective pastoral system.
- Pupils rightly view the school as a friendly, caring community.
- Sixth-form students are given good support and advice.
- Child protection procedures meet statutory requirements.
- Pupils on the SEN register have well prepared individual education plans (IEPs).
- The achievement of pupils with SEN who are taught mainly in mixed ability groups is good in most subjects. The specialist teaching in the Learning Support Group is good or very good and pupils achieve well.
- The school has satisfactory partnerships with parents and good links with the community. There is very good liaison with partner schools, and with teacher training institutions.
- The school has a satisfactory partnership with industry.

### Shortcomings

- Where teaching is only satisfactory, it is mostly because it is not matched accurately to the abilities of all pupils in the class.
- The standards of marking are inconsistent.
- Target setting, and the monitoring of progress against targets, lacks rigour in most departments.
- Even though the school has attempted to extend the number of vocational courses, the programme remains modest.
- There is no provision for religious education in the sixth-form.
- The management of overall provision for pupils with SEN, although in many respects very good, lacks the rigorous monitoring required to ensure that all pupils receive the support they need.

### Management

- The head teacher provides effective leadership and clear educational direction and has a good vision of how to achieve improvements.
- The quality of planning for improvement is good.
- The self-evaluation report is a useful and concise document.
- Members of the leadership group have clearly identified strategic roles. Departments and areas are well organised and the quality of management is good in nearly all subjects; it is never less than satisfactory.
- There is a determined and shared commitment, throughout the school, to drive up standards of achievement for all pupils.
- The governing body incorporates a wide range of expertise, is well informed and is very committed to the success of the school.
- The financial management of the school is good and available funds are managed effectively and efficiently. The school gives good value for money.
- The staff of the school is well balanced in respect of experience and qualifications.
- There is clear evidence that in-service education for teachers (INSET) has made a positive contribution to improvements in teaching and provision at whole school, departmental and individual levels.
- The quality and quantity of resources across the school are at least satisfactory in all subjects, and are good in over half.
- The provision of information technology (IT) resources is good in most subjects.

## Shortcomings

- Whilst the main buildings are of good quality, there are 22 classrooms (40% of the total accommodation) which are ‘temporary’ and are unsatisfactory, although they provide good size teaching spaces.
- The unsatisfactory facilities for physical education are a constraint on the delivery of a properly balanced programme of study based on the National Curriculum.
- The provision of IT resources in music is unsatisfactory.

## Progress since the last inspection

There were ten key issues identified in the last inspection report. The school has successfully addressed most of them, and has been particularly successful in meeting those on attendance and numeracy. In relation to the key issues on assessment and the matching of learning materials to the needs of all pupils, whilst there have been significant improvements, these are areas of continuing development in the school. The school has failed to address the key issue concerning the requirement to provide all pupils with a daily collective act of worship, and to teach religious education in the sixth-form.

## 3. EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

### 3.1 Standards achieved in subjects and areas of learning

The standards achieved by pupils are never less than satisfactory and they are good or better in 64% of classes. This is an improvement on the standards reported at the 1996 inspection when 92% were satisfactory or better and 34% were good or better, and exceeds the targets set by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2002 which were 95% and 50% respectively.

Very good standards are achieved in 8% of classes and these are found across all year groups except Y11 and Y13. The highest proportion of good and very good classes is found in the sixth-form (78%) and the lowest in KS4 (57%)

#### Standards achieved in subjects

Subject	Key Stage 3	Key Stage 4	Sixth-form
English	Good	Good	Good
Mathematics	Good	Good	Good
Science	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	-
Biology	-	-	Good
Chemistry	-	-	Satisfactory
Physics	-	-	Satisfactory
Welsh	Good	Good	Good
Design and technology (DT)	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Information technology (IT)	Good	Good	Good
History	Good	Good	Good
Geography	Good	Satisfactory	Good
Modern foreign languages (MFL)	Good	Good	-
Art	Good	Good	Good

Music	Good	Good	-
Physical education (PE)	Good	Good	-
Physical education(GCSE/A Level)	-	Satisfactory	No judgement
Religious education (RE)	Good	Good	-
Religious studies (RS)	-	Good	-
Personal social & health education	Good	Good	No Judgement
Business studies	-	-	Good
Food Studies	-	Satisfactory	-
Health and social care GCSE	-	Good	
Health and social care (Int)	-	-	Satisfactory
Health and social care (Advanced )	-	-	Good

The percentage of pupils achieving level 5 or above in NC tests at the end of KS3 has improved annually since 1996 and the rate of improvement is such that results are moving closer to national norms each year. Improvement in mathematics has been particularly good. The percentage of pupils gaining Level 5 or above in all three core subjects, the CSI, in 2002 was 43.3% which was on a par with the UA average and below the Wales figure of 50.2%. There has been continuous improvement since the last inspection.

There has also been significant improvement in performance at GCSE. In 1996, 27% of pupils achieved 5 or more GCSE grades A\*-C, which increased to 37% in 2002. Boys did better than girls and their results were above the UA average. A dip in the performance of girls in 2002 matches a similar performance by the same cohort in the year 2000 NC Tests, which the school identifies as being related to a group of girls with specific literacy difficulties. In 2002, 79% of pupils gained 5 or more A\*-G grades which is slightly down on the previous year and is below the Wales average. 90% of pupils entered 1 or more GCSE examinations, which is an improvement over recent years. 6% of pupils in 2002 gained no qualification - equal to the average for the UA and 1% more than for Wales. Achievement in the CSI was 28% in 2002, a marked improvement over previous years.

At A level or AVCE level, 51% of pupils gained 2 or more A-C grades. Boys did better than girls and did well in comparison to UA and Wales averages. Pupils gained an average points score of 17, once again boys outperformed girls and exceed UA and Wales averages.

Pupils of all abilities achieve well in most subjects, and their achievement is never less than satisfactory. Value added data indicates that potential is being achieved in most subjects.

### **3.2 Standards achieved in key skills across the curriculum**

#### **Communication**

Pupils' listening skills are well developed and standards in listening are good across the curriculum. Pupils listen carefully and attentively to the teacher, to audio-visual input, music and modern languages, to oral work and considerately to each other. They respond well to instructions and comment on suggestions. Most pupils are confident speakers, whether posing or answering questions and communicate effectively. Pupils collaborate and discuss well in pairs and small groups. They learn to negotiate and express their ideas to teachers and fellow pupils. They use specialist terms appropriately in a range of subjects. Increasingly they give reasons and justify their argument.

Reading skills are good overall. Many pupils enter the school with poor reading skills. Most improve as a result of the boost that the school's successful literacy initiative provides. Many read aloud fluently and expressively and for information and pleasure, but a significant minority is held back by poor reading skills. Sixth formers and the more able skim and scan for meaning and can compare sources. Many pupils read regularly at home and school. They have good recall and understanding. Almost all work is well presented but there is a wider variety of standards in writing than in other literacy skills. Although pupils generally take care in their work, many common errors in punctuation and spelling persist. Grammar is better. Many make their own notes in addition to those provided. Lower ability pupils tend to rely on description at the expense of analysis and evaluation. Good opportunities are provided in a range of subjects for extended writing, but this is by no means fully exploited. Much work is well organised. Many pupils are trained in drafting, editing and revising work. As they move through the school, they appreciate the need to adapt style and tone of writing for its intended purpose and audience.

Communication skills have improved since the last inspection in response to key school initiatives.

### **Numeracy**

Standards in numeracy across the curriculum are good overall. Pupils develop good skills in their mathematics lessons where they benefit from the time devoted to teaching numeracy, and from regular practice of mental mathematical skills. Many subjects use mathematics within their programmes of study, for example when using formulae in spreadsheets in IT, presenting statistical data in geography, dimensions and calculations in design and technology, interpreting numerical data in business studies, and using a wide range of mathematical applications in science.

The range of pupils' mathematical experiences throughout the school is good, and is carefully monitored by the numeracy co-ordinator. In the sixth-form, students are offered key skills lessons, which include numeracy lessons, and are able to gain a key skills qualification if they so wish.

Since the last inspection the school has taken significant strides forward in its attempts to improve the standard of numeracy across the curriculum.

### **Information Communication Technology Skills**

Standards of achievement are satisfactory.

There is appropriate and valuable coverage of ICT skills in the KS3 discrete course. Across the curriculum pupils are beginning to use a wider range of ICT skills and applications in a number of subject areas. In both KS3 and in KS4 pupils within art, history and Welsh achieve good standards in using ICT for research and in using word processing and desktop publishing applications. In all other subjects standards are satisfactory except in music where they are poor. Standards are mostly good in the sixth-form. Departments have usefully identified the use of ICT in their schemes of work, but in design and technology and mathematics more opportunities need to be provided for pupils to develop their ability in applying these skills to support learning in the subject area.

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

### **4.1 Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

The provision for pupils' spiritual and cultural development is good and provision for moral and social development is very good. Most subject departments identify opportunities for development in their schemes of work. All provision is better than at the time of the last inspection.

The effectiveness of the provision for spiritual development is reflected in the ethos of the school. There is genuine mutual respect between teachers and their pupils. Pupils respect the property of others and of the school, so attractive displays of pupils' work safely adorn the walls, no graffiti or vandalism is evident and there is little litter. The spiritual development of pupils is consciously fostered across much of the curriculum. Religious education makes a particularly significant contribution by encouraging pupils to reflect deeply upon their own values and beliefs and those of others and develop their own spiritual awareness. A sense of empathy with others and a concern for their quality of life are developed in geography and art provides regular opportunities for pupils to express their personal concerns and feelings and uses the local landscape to develop pupils' appreciation of the natural world. In history pupils discuss how people's beliefs have led them to particular courses of action, for instance in the Reformation and the Second World War.

Formal year assemblies, taken usually by the headteacher, make a significant contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. Assemblies are also used to celebrate pupil achievement. However, pupils usually participate in only one assembly per week and few form tutors follow up the assembly themes, so the school is failing to comply with the requirement for a daily act of worship for all pupils.

Pupils are taught within a sound moral framework in which their sense of right and wrong is developed. It is based upon the clear values of respect for others and personal responsibility that the school makes explicit in its aims. In business studies, design and technology, geography, information technology and science pupils are taught to respect living things and the environment. Religious education and PSHE directly and explicitly contribute well to pupils' moral development. Pupils respond positively to the trust that the school places in them.

Provision for pupils' social development is very good. In many lessons pupils work co-operatively in pairs and groups in order to exchange ideas, to discuss issues and to reach an agreed conclusion. Teachers ensure that pupils listen well to each other in class and respect each other's views. In all of this, pupils are learning to share roles and responsibilities. The school has a valuable commitment to an extensive range of community service and charity work that continues throughout the year. Sixth formers play an important part in much of this.

Many subjects make good use of the culture of other countries to enrich pupils' cultural development. Geography, history, and religious education each deals sympathetically with other cultural traditions. Professional artists and musicians visit the school. The governing body has recently approved a multicultural education policy for the school.

Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig is well developed. A recent audit revealed that all subjects make a contribution, though that made by some subjects, including business, design and technology and religious education is still limited.

## **4.2 Behaviour and attitudes**

The standard of behaviour throughout the school is very good. Pupils are polite, courteous and helpful to each other, staff and visitors. Good natured banter between individuals was observed in some groups out of the classroom but this did not escalate into anything more serious.

The vast majority of pupils show very good attitudes to learning. They are attentive, well focused on the set tasks and eager to participate in exchanges in the classroom. Very occasionally a pupil will become disengaged and potentially disruptive, but good classroom management prevails and progress in lessons is not interrupted.

Overall pupils' behaviour and attitudes contribute very significantly to the good quality of life in school.

The school's strategies for addressing behavioural issues are good; they include apposite sanctions, supportive rewards and are effective. Even so, the school reviews procedures and is currently seeking further improvement, which will promote motivation in pupils, through training staff in assertive behaviour management.

There are effective measures to eliminate bullying and other forms of discrimination, some of which are introduced to prospective pupils and parents whilst still at primary school.

## **4.3 Attendance**

In the first part of this school year overall attendance was 90%, which is satisfactory.

The attendance of the large majority of pupils is good but there is a minority for whom regular attendance has not yet been secured. These pupils, together with others taking holidays in term time, account for a significant proportion of absenteeism. In some classes such absentees potentially compromise the progress of others as they require extra teacher support to get up-to-date on their return to school.

For the school the attendance figure marks a milestone in the highly significant, extremely impressive and continuing improvement in attendance since the last inspection. The effective strategies put in place have been rigorously and relentlessly implemented by teachers. They receive essential and industrious support from the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) and Pupil Support Officer. Additional measures are under discussion to secure further improvement and to achieve the school's realistic target of 92% attendance by 2004.

Punctuality at the start of the day and to individual lessons is very good; lateness is usually associated with problems with transport. Effective procedures are in place for the monitoring of late arrival.

Registration is prompt, appropriate distinction is made between authorised and unauthorised absence, and summary statistics are appropriately collated by an administrative assistant who provides the necessary returns to the authorities. Procedures fully comply with National Assembly for Wales (NAW) Circular 3/99.

## **5. QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

### **5.1 Teaching**

The standard of teaching in the school is never less than satisfactory, and it is good or better in 71 % of classes. In 10% of classes teaching is very good. This is an improvement on the 1996 inspection when standards were satisfactory or better in 97% of classes and good in 59%, and no teaching was very good. These figures also exceed the target set by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2002 for 95 % of teaching to be satisfactory or better and for 50% to be good. Teaching is at its best in the sixth-form where 89% of lessons were good or better. At KS3 and KS4 this standard was to be found in 71 % and 63% of classes respectively. In Y7, 17% of classes have very good teaching, this reduces through Y8 and Y9 and no very good teaching was observed in Y11, (but where 61 % of classes were good). 13% of classes in the sixth-form were very good.

Teaching is good in all subjects across the curriculum other than in design and technology, and at KS3 in science and KS4 in geography where it is satisfactory. The knowledge and understanding of teachers are very good in geography, history, religious education and modern foreign languages and are good in all other subjects. The quality of planning by teachers is good in most subjects – there are clear objectives for lessons which are almost always made clear to the pupils. Lessons have a good structure and normally end with an accurate review of learning outcomes. Practical and group activities are well organised. Improvement in key skills is integral to the planning of most lessons, which reflects the priorities in the school development plan.

Classroom organisation is satisfactory at KS4 in design technology and is good elsewhere other than in art, geography and religious education at KS3 and religious education in the sixth-form where it is very good. Teachers continuously reinforce consistent and high expectations, particularly on behaviour. Pupils respond well to these expectations which have a very positive effect on learning. The range of teaching techniques used is good in most subjects and is never less than satisfactory.

The pace and challenge of lessons are always at least satisfactory. They are good across art, English, information technology, PSHE and Welsh, and at KS3 in mathematics, KS4 in history, and in the sixth-form in geography, business studies, mathematics and science. It is very good at KS3 and in the sixth-form in religious education.

The match of teaching to the abilities of pupils is satisfactory in KS3 and KS4 in design technology, geography, history, mathematics and science, and at KS3 in modern foreign languages and in Welsh in the sixth-form. Elsewhere it is good. Where teaching is only satisfactory, it is mostly because it is not matched accurately to the abilities of all pupils in the class.

## **5.2 Assessment, recording and reporting**

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

In November 2002, the school adopted a new Assessment for Learning Policy that is designed to promote further improvement in standards by developing the quality and impact of assessment, recording and reporting practice. There has not been sufficient time since its introduction to gauge the success of the new policy. Teachers are required to replace marks and grades with supportive comments. As yet this is not applied consistently, and the impact on standards is variable.

Pupils' work is marked regularly in most departments. The standards of marking vary from department to department, and between teachers in departments. Most marking gives praise for neatness and achievement, but some lacks any supportive comment. Best practice is observed when the teachers comment on strengths and weaknesses, and set a target to be achieved. Target setting, and the monitoring of progress against targets, lacks rigour in most departments; consequently the departmental targets, and those for individual pupils, are not challenging enough. There is, however, good practice in some subjects, where personal pupil interviews are conducted to review progress and agree targets. Pupils' self-assessment is good in some departments.

Most departments keep good records of pupils' progress based upon regular assessments. These are helpfully aligned to NC levels of achievement and to GCSE and General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) level descriptors. Departmental records are generally complete and accurate and detailed central records are maintained with all assessment marks.

The school meets statutory requirements for reporting to parents. Every pupil receives an end of year report and during the year will receive several short snap-shot reports. End of year reports use comment banks; they also indicate areas for improvement, but they are not always specific enough, and they do not contain targets for the future. Following the snap-shot reports, pupils and parents meet the form tutor to discuss progress; this is good practice.

## **5.3 Curriculum**

The quality, breadth and balance of the curriculum for pupils of all abilities, including those with SEN are satisfactory in all key stages. The school's curriculum meets all statutory requirements in KS3 and KS4; however there is no provision for religious education in the sixth-form. This arrangement does not meet statutory requirements.

In KS3, pupils are taught in an appropriate combination of mixed ability and set groups. In some subjects, the programme of study is carefully differentiated to meet the needs of pupils of all ability, in a minority of subjects the work does not provide sufficient challenge for all pupils. Timetable time for physical education in Y9, Y10 and Y11 is reduced making it difficult to deliver fully the requirements of the NC.

In KS4, in addition to the statutory core subjects, pupils choose courses from three option columns. Although a suitable range of GCSE courses is available, the range of vocational courses is narrow. Applied Science (GCSE) is now available for some pupils in Y10 (The school is one of three in Wales piloting this course). Pupils in the SEN group continue to be taught as a discrete group, with reduced access to the mainstream via the option subjects. Six

pupils in Y11 follow an appropriate alternative curriculum, which is well organised through Youth Access and is located away from the school. For one day, they attend a local college studying English, mathematics and life skills, the other four days are used to focus on a vocational area with opportunities to gain a National Vocational Qualification and work experience.

In the sixth-form, the school has appropriately reduced the A level and AS level programme to 13 courses in order to focus resources on their key skills initiative. Business is available as an A level and Health and Social Care is available at AVCE and GNVQ (Intermediate) levels. Although attempts have been made since the last inspection to increase the vocational curriculum, the programme remains modest. Y13 students studying religious studies as an additional subject join some Y12 classes and extra out-of-hours sessions.

The planning for the development of key skills at KS3 and KS4 is good. Since 1999, the school has invested heavily in the development of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum. These are appropriately identified in the schemes of work of all departments. In January 2003, the school was successful in gaining the Basic Skills Quality Award. Pupils develop good skills in the use of ICT in time-tabled information technology classes at KS3, and a large number choose to study the subject at KS4.

The planning for the development of key skills in the sixth-form is satisfactory. Students in Year 12 can attend a time-tabled lesson in each key skill. However only a small number complete the award in each area.

The amount of homework set is variable. Good examples of appropriate tasks, set regularly, were observed in many subjects. However in science the lack of setting regular and challenging tasks limits the progress of a number of pupils. The completion of homework tasks is also variable, especially in history and science. The absence of a homework timetable and insufficient monitoring of the pupils' planners also reduces the impact which homework can have in raising standards of achievement.

The arrangements for teaching PSHE are very good. Pupils value the content of the course, which is closely linked to the guidelines set out by the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority of Wales (ACCAC). All pupils in KS3 and KS4 have a time-tabled lesson in the subject each week. A PSHE programme is also available for students in Year 12. Provision for careers education within the programme is good. Pupils in Year 10 and students in Year 12 have a one week work experience placement.

There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities across all subjects for pupils of all ages. Apart from organising clubs, teachers give generously of their time to support individuals and small groups to make progress. Pupils enrich their learning through many visits off-site for fieldwork, language courses, lectures and to venues such as theatres, museums and galleries. Many visits abroad take place for a range of curricular, social and sporting purposes. Students in the sixth-form have a wide range of opportunities through lectures, Young Enterprise, Understanding Industry, first-aid courses, in addition to subject orientated clubs. Pupils benefit from these activities, which broaden their experiences and promote their personal and social development.

## 5.4 Support, guidance and pupils' welfare

The quality of support and guidance and procedures for promoting pupils' welfare are good. The many strengths identified in the last inspection are still evident. The school has a very effective pastoral system. The good work of tutors and year heads is crucial to its efficiency. All teachers offer substantial assistance and encouragement to pupils, whether as subject teachers or form teachers and in monitoring their work and progress, and give much time in supporting extra-curricular activities. There is an established school council of elected representatives that has helped to provide improvements and insights. Pupils rightly view the school as a friendly, caring community.

With the exception of a permanent head of Y7, who works closely with primary schools, teams of form tutors and heads of year move up through the school with their pupils and come to know their pupils and parents well. Pupils are confident that they can count on teaching and non-teaching staff for help if requested and that any form of harassment is promptly and properly dealt with. Tutor time is now mostly used constructively to contribute actively to pupils' support guidance and development.

Pupils are well supported at their transfer from primary schools. In the transition to KS4 they receive careers education and guidance (CEG) lessons and individual counselling in choice of courses and later in their choices post-16. There is extensive support for sixth-formers' further career choices.

Good provision is made for CEG. In Y9 and through KS4, units of work form parts of the PSHE programme and are taught separately, mainly by the head of careers. Very good support from the careers advisory service is available from Y8 onwards. Pupils are thoroughly prepared by the school for their work experience in Y10 and 12. Placements are well planned and are monitored by volunteer teachers who visit all pupils. Pupils' evaluation of placements form part of their Record of Achievement, together with associated action plans, and other evidence identifying their achievements.

Form tutors collate information from subject teachers and hold two effective report days each year with parents and pupils, sharing progress. Form tutors and heads of year work well to help pupils identified as underachieving, involving parents effectively in the process. In Y11, such pupils are mentored additionally by senior staff. Pupils mainly use their planners well, but there are some inconsistencies. The social inclusion policy of the school has been implemented successfully to help a small number of disaffected pupils, giving them a greater incentive to take advantage of their education. Extensive links with external support agencies and services are good.

Sixth-form students are given good support and advice. They respond well to the opportunities that they receive to shoulder responsibilities, such as listening to younger pupils reading, thus building up good relationships, and organising charity work.

The school nurse is in school daily for an hour. Good procedures and availability of staff with first aid training, ensure that any health problems are dealt with effectively. Child protection procedures are well known to staff and fully meet statutory requirements. Pupils looked after by the UA have appropriate care plans. Whilst procedures for ensuring pupils' health and safety are generally good, a small number of minor concerns were brought to the attention of the school.

## **5.5 Provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN)**

The school's provision for pupils with SEN is satisfactory

There are 188 pupils on the school's register for SEN, around one quarter of the school's roll. This is a little above the average for Wales. Twenty-eight of these pupils have statements of special educational needs, a proportion that is above the average for Wales. All pupils on the register for pupils with SEN have IEPs that meet the requirements of the Code of Practice.

Most pupils with SEN are identified by their primary schools so that appropriate provision can be made for them immediately. In line with the Code of Practice the school operates a staged referral system including the use of data from a range of standardised tests.

For pupils who are in the Learning Support classes achievement is good in all subjects other than in art, design and technology, French, geography, science and Welsh where it is satisfactory. The achievement of the pupils with SEN who are taught mainly in mixed ability groups is good in French, history, information technology, mathematics music, physical education, PSHE, religious education and Welsh, and is satisfactory elsewhere. Only six per cent of pupils fail to gain qualifications at the end of KS4, a proportion that is in line with the average for Wales.

The achievement of more able pupils in relation to their ability is generally good and in a few subjects satisfactory, but in many subjects the achievement of pupils identified as gifted and talented is less than it could be as a result of insufficiently challenging work set in lessons. The proportion of pupils gaining the highest grades A\*-A in GCSE 2002 showed significant variation between subjects

About one third of pupils with SEN, including all those with statements of SEN, are taught in mainly small discrete Learning Support classes. The specialist teaching is good or very good and pupils achieve well. The rest of the teaching they experience is always at least satisfactory and often good. However, the ability range in some of the Learning Support classes is very wide and in some lessons tasks and materials for pupils are not sufficiently modified so the more able pupils under-achieve.

All other pupils with SEN are taught in mixed ability groups, as is predominantly the case in KS3, or in ability related sets. Many of these pupils are taught well. In a significant number of subjects the work is not well modified and the achievement and progress of pupils with SEN is limited. There are no learning support assistants to support the learning of pupils with particularly low literacy skills in lessons and these pupils do not always receive the support they need in lessons.

There is some helpful additional curricular provision for some pupils with SEN who are not in the Learning Support classes. Members of the English department teach pupils in Y7 and Y8 in fairly small discrete groups for English/literacy. Four literacy support assistants effectively support these classes. They also offer a very small amount of help in the Learning Support classes. The school has very good provision for the use of a computer integrated learning system which helps pupils develop their literacy and numeracy skills. Their progress is monitored by the head of IT and is overseen by the heads of English and maths.

The SENCO is well-qualified and very experienced, and is also the co-ordinator for gifted and talented pupils. The SENCO maintains useful contacts with other teachers and the relationships are good with a range of external agencies. All statutory requirements including the annual report of governors to parents and the provision of a policy for pupils with SEN are met fully. The school has recently undertaken an Accessibility Audit to meet the requirements of the Disability Act.

The management of provision for pupils with SEN is delegated to several co-ordinators: literacy, numeracy, ICT, SENCO, and an assistant head with responsibility for key skills. Although provision is in many respects very good, it lacks the rigorous monitoring required to ensure that all pupils receive the support they need.

Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

## **5.6 Partnership with parents and community, schools and other institutions**

The school's satisfactory partnership with parents and good links with the community contributes well to pupils' overall development. Very good liaison with partner schools, and with initial teacher training institutions, facilitate good educational and pastoral support for all pupils.

Parents receive a clearly written prospectus which describes well the school's organisation, curriculum and pastoral arrangements, and a comprehensive review of the school's year in the annual report from the governors. However, the prospectus does not contain details of any equal opportunities policy, arrangements for pupils with disabilities or security measures to ensure the health and safety of pupils and staff. These are statutory requirements.

The school provides informative reports on pupils' progress and parents enjoy good opportunities to discuss these and other matters, with teachers. The Parent and Teacher Association (PTA) comprises a small but active group that serves the school well by fund-raising and in support of school events including a disco for pupils.

The headteacher plays a leading role in community activities and the school benefits from links for pupils' educational and personal development. Local visits, and visitors, support curricular teaching in several departments, and some initiatives help provide useful placements for vocational training for less academic pupils. Pupils' wider understanding is enhanced by visits to old peoples' homes, performing Carols at Christmas, and involvement in charity work in aid of local, national and international concerns. The local community uses the school premises as a venue for adult education, sports and leisure activities.

Links with partner primary schools are very good. Regular meetings of the cluster group, which are productive and well-minuted, discuss matters of common concern. Reciprocal visits by teachers ensure secure educational and pastoral knowledge of incoming pupils. Curriculum projects, bridging Y6 and Y7, in English, mathematics and one other curriculum subject, which varies in rotation from year to year, maintain good educational continuity. A broad based programme of pupil visits for classroom teaching, music or sports events further eases transition to KS3.

Good liaison with neighbouring Further Education colleges gives ample awareness of a broad range of educational opportunities and provides useful vocational training for less academic pupils in Y10 and Y11. Good links with local universities enable pupils to visit and experience at first hand the student environment, as well as to explore the educational opportunities on offer.

Well-established links with initial teacher training institutions provide several trainees each year. Pupils benefit from the different perspectives and new ideas these trainees bring to the classroom.

## **5.7 Partnership with industry**

The school has a satisfactory partnership with industry. The policy and strategies for work related education are good.

In collaboration with the Careers Wales the school provides pupils in Y10 and Y12 with appropriate work experience training in the limited number of industries and businesses within easy reach of the school. This takes place at the very end of the summer term. Pupils are well briefed before their placement, keep useful diaries of their experiences and receive feedback from employers but the value of this information is significantly reduced as the opportunity for debriefing and discussion is necessarily postponed until the following academic year. In further preparation for employment pupils enter into useful Compact agreements which focus on developing personal skills. Supportive mentoring and mock interviews are arranged for targeted pupils

Staff placements in industry are encouraged and each year several teachers benefit from such opportunities. However, local opportunities are restricted and the school has some difficulty identifying appropriate training further afield.

The school enjoys a good partnership with a careers company, whose representative is available in school on a regular basis and provides up-to-date and apposite advice to teachers and pupils. The good quality of the careers education fully illuminates the links between curriculum education and employment. Links with the EBP, which help broker work-experience and staff placements, have recently not been fully effective.

Overall the work related education provides a satisfactory encouragement to learning and appropriate extra-curricular experiences.

# **6. MANAGEMENT**

## **6.1 Quality of self-evaluation and planning for improvement**

The quality of planning for improvement is good. The current school development plan (2002 –2004) focuses very clearly on the identified priorities needed to maintain the drive to raise the standards in key skills, and the associated aspects of assessment, attendance and the increased involvement of parents. The development plan includes a useful review of progress, and all development tasks have appropriate timescales and costs. Where it is appropriate,

quantifiable targets are included. These strategies have been largely successful and there has been considerable improvement since the previous inspection. Department development plans all reflect the priorities identified by the school, reinforcing the drive for improvement, and the quality of departmental planning is always satisfactory and occasionally good.

The self-evaluation report is a useful and concise document that is based on a wide range of data and evidence collected and analysed in detail as part of the internal self-evaluation activities of the school. The process uses information from primary schools, standardised test scores, assessment information from departments and a range of value added indicators. These data are helpfully made widely available in the school and are currently used to supply departments with predictions of future pupil performance in tests and examinations. The school, together with the UA agrees quantitative targets for improvement at whole school level.

Each department has a valuable annual review of progress in achieving departmental development plans with senior managers, and members of the leadership group have links with departments that allow them to monitor progress. Monitoring of the work of departments is at least satisfactory in all subjects and is good in half. Class observation is a feature of monitoring in most departments.

The head has a clear vision regarding the future of the school, a vision he pursues with determination. Members of the leadership group have clearly identified strategic roles and have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. A clear culture of raising standards of achievement and continuous improvement has been established. The quality of teaching and learning and the ethos of the school are given high priority.

Plans for the introduction of Performance Management are in place.

## **6.2 Leadership and efficiency**

There is a determined and shared commitment, throughout the school, to drive up standards of achievement for all pupils whatever their abilities and attitudes. The head teacher provides effective leadership and clear educational direction and has a good vision of how to achieve improvements. He has the support of the staff and of parents and the community. He is supported well by the deputy head teacher. The leadership group includes the head teacher, deputy head teacher and three assistant heads. The assistant heads are well deployed to develop and co-ordinate a range of challenging key priorities. They have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities and the quality of leadership is consistently good.

Departments and areas are well organised and the quality of management is good in nearly all subjects; it is never less than satisfactory. The day-to-day running of the Learning Support department and the maintenance of the extensive paperwork required for the provision for pupils with SEN are very good. The effectiveness of planning within departments is good. Year teams work well together to support pupils and to monitor their academic and wider progress. Communication between staff with pastoral and academic responsibilities is very good and pastoral year teams are well managed.

Communication is good throughout the school. There are regular briefings and meetings at all levels and a clear and consistent focus on the priorities identified in the development plan.

Teachers and their support staff work well together so that the day-to-day organisation of the school is very good. The governing body incorporates a wide range of expertise, is well informed and very committed to the success of the school. Governors understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school and fully support the priorities identified to drive forward improvements. They are fully involved in financial decisions, curriculum and other planning procedures and in staff appointments.

The financial management of the school is good and available funds are managed effectively and efficiently. The budget is administered well and there is close attention to day-to-day expenditure. Financial planning is directly related to the priorities identified in the school development plan. There are appropriate procedures to ensure best value for money. The few recommendations in the last Audit Report have been implemented. The school gives good value for money.

Funding for departments is used effectively and includes allocations to subjects based on a formula and a development fund to which areas can bid.

### **6.3 Staffing, accommodation and learning resources**

#### ***Staffing***

Staff are highly committed to the success of the school and to their pupils. The pupil/teacher ratio for the school is 17.03:1, which is very slightly higher than for Wales. Teachers are well qualified and there is a good balance between experienced teachers and those new to the profession. A significant number of teachers have been at the school for over 10 years, and over half the staff have more than fifteen years teaching experience. Almost all are graduates and have teaching qualifications appropriate to their responsibilities. Staff are very well deployed to cover their curricular and pastoral roles. Non contact time is generally in line with responsibilities.

The support staff, including office and clerical staff, laboratory, workshop and resource technicians and a librarian provide effective and valuable support across a wide range of duties and responsibilities. They make a valuable contribution to the achievements of the school.

There is an effective programme of staff training as one would expect in a school with Investors in People (IIP) status. Whole school and individual training are carefully allocated to meet whole school priorities identified in the school development plan and recent curriculum initiatives. There is clear evidence that staff training has made a positive contribution to improvements in teaching and provision at whole school, departmental and individual levels.

There is a good induction programme for newly qualified teachers and those new to the school. Support for supply teachers is good. The school has good links with initial teacher training establishments and students are prepared well and follow an appropriate timetable.

## ***Accommodation***

The school occupies a difficult site but accommodation is currently sufficient to meet the curriculum and pastoral needs of pupils. The steep access road to the site causes difficulties in freezing weather and in snow, which is exacerbated by the shortage of off-road parking spaces. The new footpath (funded by Safe Routes to School, Caerphilly CBC and Groundwork) will improve access and safety for pupils. Whilst the main buildings are of good quality, there are some 22 classrooms (40% of the total accommodation) which are 'temporary' and unsatisfactory. The classrooms in the temporary accommodation give good size teaching spaces and are well managed by the school. The school hall doubles as the dining room, and is occasionally used for physical education lessons.

Almost all subject rooms are grouped together which supports departmental activities. Unsatisfactory facilities for physical education are a constraint on the delivery of a properly balanced programme of study based on the National Curriculum. The gymnasium is the only indoor space and is heavily used by both the school and community – lack of storage space means that the sides of the gymnasium are cluttered with equipment which limits usable floor space and is a constant health and safety issue. Changing rooms are cramped. The school is unable to make full use of their grass pitches for most of the year and all school team fixtures in the major games are played away from home. Hard play areas will need repair and maintenance in the near future.

Throughout the school most departments make good use of the available accommodation. The inside of the buildings is well maintained with good displays of pupils' work and furniture is in a good condition. Classrooms provide a stimulating learning environment and subject identity with good displays of pupils' work. There are good displays in a number of corridors that celebrate achievement in subjects and extra-curricular activities.

There is a site manager who co-ordinates health and safety risk assessments. There is a marked absence of both graffiti and litter in the school and around the site

## ***Resources***

The quality and quantity of resources across the school are at least satisfactory in all subjects, and are good in over half. In a majority of subjects available resources are used well. The provision of IT resources is good in most subjects except music where it is unsatisfactory. Provision of computers in the school is good. There are good ICT facilities for pupils with SEN, and there is extensive use made of a computer based integrated learning system (SuccessMaker). The ICT co-ordinator has insufficient time to liaise fully with departments to ensure that planned experiences are fully implemented and pupils' achievements are recorded. Booking procedures and monitoring of the use of ICT rooms does not encourage the maximum use of these facilities.

The library provides a satisfactory whole school resource centre. It is used by sixth-form students during the school day. A number of departments make use of this valuable resource and encourage pupils to use the facilities for research. There is a suite of computers and the quantity of books is almost equal to the recommended levels. The full time librarian is very helpful and is building good relationships with pupils and departments. The library is open to pupils at lunchtime.

## 7. SUBJECTS AND AREAS OF LEARNING

### Standards achieved by pupils

#### English

Standards of achievement in English are mainly good in KS3. They are good in KS4 and the sixth-form.

Pupils enter the school with scores which are below average and in many cases which are well below average. In response to the school's priority literacy project, the proportion of pupils gaining level 5 and above in the end of KS3 NC tests, has improved annually so that in 2002 it was higher than the UA figures and just below the average for Wales. Girls' performance equalled the Welsh average. GCSE results have also improved. In GCSE English a greater proportion of the cohort was entered than for Wales overall. A\*-C grades were just below UA and national figures, although the gap has dramatically decreased. A higher proportion of the cohort than nationally was also entered for English literature, where the proportion of higher grades achieved was also just below the UA and national averages. Here, too, the difference is now much smaller. In each subject the proportions achieving grade A\*-G are close to local and national figures. In line with national figures girls mainly perform better than boys. A level results from relatively small groups, reflect students' ability and are generally good.

These results demonstrate good achievement and progress as pupils move through the school.

#### Good features

##### *KS3 and KS4*

- Results in external tests and examinations are improving.
- Time in the one hour lessons is used purposefully. Pupils respond well to teachers' expectations.
- Most pupils with low literacy skills make very good progress in response to the good support in the school's literacy initiative.
- Pupils with SEN benefit from the support they are given and mainly achieve well.
- Pupils take care in their work. Most prepare work carefully.
- Pupils have good listening skills and are considerate listeners.
- Most develop as clear and confident speakers, whether posing or answering questions and communicate effectively with growing conviction.
- They summarise and report well.
- They enjoy reading in class. Most pupils come to read aloud with accuracy and fluency.
- Pupils work very well in pairs and small groups. They use their speaking and listening skills effectively. They negotiate, discuss competently and express their ideas to fellow pupils.
- They develop a good knowledge of texts and of literacy and grammatical techniques. They show good recall and understanding.
- Much good work and insights result from study of poetry. More able pupils appreciate linguistic devices used for particular effect.

- Many have become enthusiastic or regular readers at school and at home.
- They learn how to work in a variety of forms, some of which are linked to their reading. Many learn to structure their ideas persuasively. They can adapt tone and register for a range of audiences and purposes.
- Coursework is well done. Pupils learn to draft, edit and redraft work.
- They respond well to drama approaches.
- KS4 pupils show insights and perception to characters and plot development. They compare and contrast effectively.
- They begin to appreciate the criteria for success.

### ***Sixth-form***

- Students' skills of interpretation and deduction develop well.
- They develop a sound command of technical vocabulary, authors' techniques and devices.
- They organise and justify their opinions with evidence and quotations. They work well together, sharing and teasing out their thoughts. They show evidence of original thought and are willing to challenge others' opinions.
- They can use their ICT skills to help them develop their responses and communications.
- They empathise with characters.
- They assess strengths and weaknesses in exemplar materials realistically and accurately.

### **Shortcomings**

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

- Low literacy levels on entry make it difficult for a number of pupils to access the curriculum fully.
- Research skills are less well developed than literary, creative and narrative response.
- There is a wider range in writing standards than in speaking, listening and reading. Generally good grammar, on occasions, is not well served by common errors in punctuation and spelling. The writing of a proportion of pupils lacks development and organisation.

Progress since the last inspection is good. Standards of achievement have improved. Whole school literacy levels have been raised.

## **Mathematics**

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

The results at the end of KS3 tests in 2002 showed that the percentage of pupils that achieved level 5 or better was a little lower than the all-Wales average, but it has improved steadily since the last inspection. At GCSE, the 2002 results continue the annual trend of improvement since 1996. The results at A level in 2002 were good.

### **Good features**

#### ***KS3***

- Pupils make good progress from Y7 to Y9. This can be seen clearly in the good quality work in their exercise books. Most work is well organised and complete.

- Pupils' basic numerical skills are good. Their mental mathematical skills are well developed during regular practice sessions.
- In most classes, pupils can explain clearly what they are doing, and show that they understand the mathematical concepts involved.
- Pupils make appropriate and accurate use of electronic calculators, in line with the department's policy.
- Pupils often ask questions to confirm understanding, and suggest alternative methods of solution, using correct terminology.
- In geometry, pupils know the names and properties of many shapes and solids. They draw and measure accurately in most classes.
- Pupils with SEN make good progress and achieve good standards.

#### ***KS4***

- As at KS3, most pupils use calculators well and appropriately.
- Pupils consolidate their ability to do basic arithmetical operations. The work with numbers is good.
- The principles of algebra are developing well, particularly amongst the more able pupils. All pupils learn to draw and investigate the properties of geometric shapes at an appropriate level.
- Pupils learn how to collect, represent and interpret statistical data.
- The majority listen carefully to instructions, and get on well with the individual tasks and problems set for them.
- Pupils produce neat and accurate work in their books.

#### ***Sixth-form***

- All the students have a very good work ethic. They organise themselves and their work effectively.
- Students recall a good range of previous work and they use it well in new situations.

#### **Shortcomings**

##### ***KS3***

- A few pupils are unsure of their tables, and this hinders their progress.

##### ***KS4***

- Some of the abler pupils become bored because of the slow pace of some of the lessons.
- Pupils' attainment targets are not high enough; pupils in the top and middle ability groups need to develop more confidence and determination to tackle their work.

##### ***Sixth-form***

- Some of the students rely too heavily upon their teachers for guidance; they show little initiative in their learning.
- Students do not contribute sufficiently to discussions about their work.

## **Science**

Standards of achievement are satisfactory at KS3 and KS4. In the sixth-form, they are good in biology and satisfactory in chemistry and physics.

At KS3, the percentage of pupils obtaining level 5 and above in the national tests in 2001 and 2002 was below the UA and Wales figures; however there was a significant improvement in 2002. At KS4, the percentage of pupils gaining grades A\*-C in both years was also below LEA and national averages, and fell in 2002. At A level, the number of students entered in the three subjects was very small, therefore comparisons are unhelpful.

### **Good features**

#### ***KS3***

- At KS3, more able and a minority of average ability pupils have a good understanding of a wide range of topics covering all aspects of the NC. They have a good recall of key concepts and ideas and apply them to a range of problems and applications in everyday life.
- Pupils with SEN make good progress. They often use scientific terminology well to explain basic principles.
- Pupils develop satisfactory and sometimes good practical skills.
- The cognitive acceleration through science (CASE) lessons are beginning to have a positive impact in developing pupils' scientific thinking skills.
- Pupils make satisfactory use of mathematical skills in scientific contexts.
- Pupils make satisfactory use of ICT to further their scientific understanding.

#### ***KS4***

- At KS4, more able pupils and a minority of average ability pupils have a detailed understanding of more complex principles developed in the key stage in life processes and living things, materials and their properties and physical processes.
- More able and a minority of average ability pupils can apply their understanding to a range of problems relating to the application of scientific principles, environmental and health issues in science.
- The quality of investigations is good overall, and very good with a small number of able pupils. Extended writing is well developed with a significant number of these investigations.
- Satisfactory progress is being made with classes following the GCSE Applied Science course.
- Pupils make satisfactory use of mathematical and ICT skills to support their learning in science.
- Pupils work safely and collaborate well during practical work.

#### ***Sixth-form***

- The majority of students in biology, and a minority in chemistry and physics make good progress and have a good understanding of key concepts. These students can apply complex scientific principles to a range of problems and applications.
- Some students demonstrate good skills of independent learning and give presentations of good quality.

- A minority of students demonstrate good practical skills, use apparatus competently and have a good understanding of the methodology and limitations of the techniques used.

### **Shortcomings**

#### ***KS3***

- At KS3, a significant number of average and lower ability pupils do not have secure recall of current and previous work. They often have difficulty in applying scientific principles to a range of contexts.
- There is evidence of a significant amount of incomplete work in class and homework tasks.
- A significant number of pupils do not work to their full potential.
- The standard of investigative skills is satisfactory, overall. Although there are examples of good progress in some aspects of the skill areas, insufficient focus has been given to giving pupils the experience of regularly developing this area of the programme of study.

#### ***KS4***

- At KS4, the majority of average and lower ability pupils make satisfactory progress. These pupils have a limited recall of previously covered work, and their understanding of key concepts limits progress. This is particularly seen in the inconsistent performance of a significant number of pupils in module tests.
- In a small number of investigations, the lack of preliminary work in the planning stage, the drawing of inappropriate graphs, the lack of in depth analysis and evaluation, prevent access to the higher marks.
- There is evidence of a significant amount of incomplete work in class and homework tasks.

#### ***Sixth-form***

- In the sixth-form, a majority of students in chemistry and physics have a less secure understanding of a range of scientific principles and have difficulty applying them to more demanding problems.
- A minority of students lack confidence when completing practical tasks.

Since the last inspection the department has made some progress.

### **Welsh second language**

Standards of achievement in listening, speaking, reading and writing are good in KS3 and KS4 and satisfactory in the sixth-form. Pupils enjoy their Welsh lessons and have a positive attitude to the language. In KS4 the vast majority of the pupils sit external examinations and the full course GCSE examination results, A\*-C, compare favourably with the national average.

### **Good features**

#### ***KS3***

- Pupils listen well to their teachers when they speak in Welsh and they follow the instructions and explanations given. They answer oral questions quite confidently.

- The listening skill is developed well within the key stage and pupils understand short items read by the teacher and produced on video tapes and cassettes. They select relevant information to answer basic questions orally and in writing. Able pupils listen to and understand topics on a variety of subjects.
- Pupils are keen to volunteer answers and co-operate well in pair and group work. The majority are confident when speaking as individuals and in paired work when talking about familiar topics.
- They ask and answer questions on a variety of topics and give explanations for preferences. They confidently use basic patterns like 'achos ..' to give explanations and they use other basic constructions and vocabulary well.
- Able pupils give good reasons to back up their opinions. They vary their constructions well when asking and answering questions and speak Welsh with a good degree of fluency.
- Pupils read aloud with confidence in an interesting and meaningful way; their pronunciation is good across the ability range. They make good progress within the key stage.
- Pupils, on the whole, write to a good standard responding to a variety of stimuli. They use familiar patterns correctly, and they vary the person and the tense of the verb to good effect in structured work.
- Both the middle and higher ability pupils produce extended pieces of writing and they use IT to produce pages to display in the classroom. The standards of accuracy and punctuation of the more able pupils are good and they use constructions presented earlier in the key stage well.

#### ***KS4***

- Pupils work well in groups, following set tasks, they express opinions and use evidence. Able pupils discuss ambitious topics in a meaningful way. They are able to expand on basic statements and opinions and use an appropriate range of vocabulary when discussing topics such as 'smoking'.
- Pupils read to a good standard. When reading aloud, pupils' expression is clear and meaningful. They show good understanding of a range of material and respond well both orally and in writing. The more able pupils read extended texts on topics of some difficulty and answer questions well to show understanding.
- Most of the pupils use a range of basic constructions and tenses correctly when writing tasks for their GCSE folio work. The more able pupils respond to the more challenging GCSE topics well and write with a good degree of accuracy. When expressing opinions they structure their arguments well and support these with evidence from their own experience.

#### ***Sixth-form***

- Y12 and Y13 students are making satisfactory progress at present but standards in the AS and A level examinations in the past have been good.
- They cope quite well when expressing basic ideas and Y13 students are beginning to adjust to the demands of their course.
- They read difficult passages well and their pronunciation is good. Their vocabulary is developing quite well and their understanding of poetry and prose is progressing slowly.

## **Shortcomings**

### ***KS3***

- The more able pupils do not listen and watch more extended items of a more demanding nature and discuss them in groups agreeing and disagreeing with each other.
- Most pupils do not read independently from a sufficient wide range of materials. They do not respond to stories by expressing opinions about the stories and discussing the content and characters.

### ***KS4***

- Middle and lower ability pupils give short answers and do not produce extended contributions. They are too dependent on their notes.
- Creative writing is underdeveloped.

### ***Sixth-form***

- Both Y12 and Y13 pupils are reluctant to expand on their ideas and lack fluency to discuss ideas expressed in the poems and in the prose work.
- Y13 students find difficulty in progressing from the GCSE standard of writing to that needed for the AS level.

Standards have improved since the last inspection. Reading for pleasure remains a weakness.

## **Design and technology**

Standards of achievement are satisfactory at KS3 and at KS4. About one quarter of the cohort in 2002 sat GCSE Design and Technology/Resistant Materials, and higher grade results improved on the previous year. All pupils gained a grade in the A\*- G range

### **Good features**

#### ***KS3***

- Pupils understand the design process.
- Pupils show knowledge of a variety of skills and processes.
- Pupils experience and make use of a variety of materials when fulfilling their project work.
- Pupils can identify and suggest possible areas for research and analysis when presented with a design problem.
- Practical skills are executed safely and pupils often produce well- made items.
- Pupils participate well in whole class and group activities.
- Written standards are generally good.
- Pupils' study booklets provide a guide through specific tasks and allow pupils opportunities to express individual ideas.
- Pupils with SEN and lower ability pupils benefit from modified tasks and achieve well in relation to their ability.
- Pupils make satisfactory use of some ICT applications when developing their design and technology project work.

#### **KS4**

- Pupils demonstrate a knowledge of designing skills.
- Practical and making skills have a sound foundation and are implemented safely.
- There are some examples of accurately manufactured and well made products.
- There are some relevant examples of pupils modelling and experimenting with their design ideas.
- Pupils understand and make use of technical terminology.
- There are some project work examples of an interesting nature linked to computer aided design and computer aided manufacture (Cad/Cam) applications.

#### **Shortcomings**

##### **KS3**

- Design principles are considered but not universally implemented in a refined and organised way; links between initial specification and evaluation are not always addressed.
- The sketching, annotation and presentation of drawings often lack precision and neatness.
- There are some examples of incomplete work in pupils' folders.

##### **KS4**

- Pupils need to organise and improve their design folio presentation.
- Developmental and creative sketching is under-developed.
- Pupils use and development of design specifications often lacks focus and detail and are not always linked to final product outcomes and evaluation.
- Pupils use a limited range of materials and types of project work, which limits achievement.
- The quality and final finish of some manufactured outcomes is not good enough.

Some progress has been made since the last inspection through the provision of ICT applications in pupils' design and technology experience.

### **Information technology**

Standards of achievement in KS3 and KS4 are good. In the sixth-form standards are good.

About 60% of the cohort in 2002 sat the GCSE and results were an improvement on the previous year. Almost all pupils gained a grade within the A\*- G range. Advanced subsidiary and advanced level results saw all pupils gaining passes and making positive progress.

#### **Good features**

##### **KS3**

- Pupils demonstrate a confident use of the hardware and software packages available.
- Pupils can use the mouse and keyboard effectively.
- Pupils can handle icons, menus and functions appropriately and helpfully when undertaking their tasks.

- Work within pupils' files and on display shows sound attainment in communicating information through word processed text, which includes graphical images imported from a variety of sources.
- Both written and graphical work done well developed and show evidence of drafting and re-drafting, pupils show good ability in their organising and combining of information in various forms.
- Pupils can explain their work and its development.
- There is positive manipulation of data through spreadsheet work with accurate modelling of results.
- Pupils can draw up a questionnaire, create a database from it and understand the questioning of data.
- Pupils with SEN and low ability pupils make valuable progress in taught lessons, they also benefit from the opportunity provided by use of integrated learning software (SuccessMaker) study.
- Pupils display a willing approach to problem solving and are often enthusiastic and questioning in their approach.

#### ***KS4***

- Pupils to apply their ICT skills appropriately to a good range of tasks in a variety of contexts.
- There is a valuable approach to problem solving which encourages both independent and collaborative learning to take place.
- Pupils understand procedures, and are competent and confident in their use of equipment and software and show much capability when integrating a variety of information into their work from a range of sources.
- Pupils make appropriate use of technical terminology in their written work and in conversation and discussion.
- Project preparation skills are good and develop well from year 10 to 11.
- Pupils demonstrate a valid analysis of project briefs and formulate relevant and thoughtful responses.
- There is evidence of sound preparatory work and due attention paid to evaluation and modification in pupils' work.
- Pupils produce well-structured project work which has accurate content and is well presented.
- Pupils have a secure appreciation of the role of ICT in everyday use.
- Pupils with SEN and slow learning pupils are well supported within a variety of relevant tasks and make good progress in relation to their abilities.

#### ***Sixth-form***

##### ***AS, A level and Key Skills Courses***

- Project work demonstrates some sound problem solving.
- Project work is well structured and thoughtfully presented.
- Students often work independently and in their own time.
- Students use a range of applications to access information and apply data.
- Students handle information effectively through the use of appropriate software packages.
- Students have a sound understanding and knowledge of the basic theory relating to computer systems.

- Students have very positive commitment to developing a comprehensive range of ICT skills through their project development.
- Students demonstrate good capability in integrating software packages, making use of the internet and other sources of information when fulfilling their studies.

### **Shortcomings**

#### **KS3**

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

Some good progress has been made since the last inspection

### **History**

Standards of achievement are good in KS3, KS4 and in the sixth-form. In 2002, GCSE results were below both the national and local averages, and also lower than the very high results achieved by the school in 2001. All pupils entered achieved a pass grade which is above the average for Wales. The results show positive progress grades for most pupils. Boys performed better at A\*-C grades. Two pupils entered a year early achieved A\*-C grades. Pupils following the CoEA course in Y11 make good progress and achieve a sound level of success. In the A level examinations in 2002, all candidates achieved at least a pass grade.

### **Good features**

#### **KS3**

- In KS3 pupils' chronological awareness is securely based. They understand the nature of historical evidence and show increasing confidence in extracting accurate and relevant information from a variety of sources. More able pupils can analyse and evaluate sources, and use the sources effectively to substantiate their opinions.
- Pupils display a sound grasp of background knowledge and understanding. They recall information accurately from their work, for instance on the Normans.
- They use historical terms appropriately and are developing a clear insight into the process of change. Pupils can identify and categorise a variety of causes for change. They make good progress in distinguishing between long-term and short-term causes of change for instance in their work on the causes of the Spanish Armada. More able pupils can clearly recognise the many overlapping issues involved.
- Pupils conduct well thought out investigations. They understand how and why historical accounts differ and can appreciate that there is often more than one interpretation.
- Pupils can select, organise and communicate historical information in a variety of ways. More able pupils produce well structured narratives, descriptions and explanations.
- More able pupils demonstrate the ability to empathise with the lives and attitudes of people in the past.
- Pupils' knowledge and understanding of the history of Wales is well developed through topic work, project work and visits to sites of historical importance.
- Pupils with SEN are making good progress in KS3.

#### **KS4**

- In KS4 pupils have a secure knowledge base and use historical terms aptly.
- By KS4 the majority of pupils' work is carefully planned and well presented. Increasing use of their ICT skills results in well illustrated topic work and coursework. The most able pupils' work shows a growing maturity in the depth of response to questions.
- Pupils' understanding of the key historical concepts is becoming more analytical. Most pupils use sources skilfully and make good use of literary sources of evidence. They develop an increasingly analytical approach to historical problems, testing their sources of evidence for bias, reliability and usefulness.
- Pupils develop good investigative approaches in examining historical problems. They understand the principles of selecting and weighing evidence. More able pupils can use their knowledge and understanding to compare, contrast and judge various interpretations.
- Pupils with SEN are making good progress in KS4

#### **Sixth-form**

- The majority of students produce well planned essays which provide good evidence of wide background reading and research. A significant number of these students produce evaluative analytical accounts focused upon addressing the particular problems posed in the question.
- Students show growing confidence in working with sources.
- Most students are able to apply their knowledge to analyse and evaluate interpretations.

#### **Shortcomings**

There are no major shortcomings.

The department has responded positively and made good progress in addressing the issues raised in the previous inspection.

### **Geography**

Standards of achievement are good at KS 3, satisfactory at KS 4 and good in the sixth-form. Although GCSE results at grades A\*-C in 2002 were a little below the average for Wales, they were up on the previous year. All pupils entered achieved a pass grade which is above the average for Wales. In 2002 all students passed A level with good grades.

#### **Good features**

#### **KS 3**

- In the teacher-assessed tests at the end of Y9 in 2002 pupils' attainment was at the national average.
- Pupils acquire and use with confidence, a good geographical vocabulary. Although recall among pupils with SEN is weak and they need prompting they do use the appropriate vocabulary.
- Pupils have a sound understanding of some significant geographical processes such as the causes and effects of population growth and how economic migration leads to the rise of shantytowns in developing countries.

- Pupils' progress in developing such geographical skills as map reading and interpretation, the construction and interpretation of climate graphs and interpretation of information of photographs is good.
- Pupils make good use of ICT for research and to present their work, as in their production of their own newspaper accounts of a recent local oil spill.

#### ***KS4***

- Pupils' coursework is of a high standard. They carry out a competent first hand investigation, analyse their results and present them well in the form of maps, diagrams, and graphs. They make good use of ICT to present their work.
- Pupils understand how a range of interacting physical and human processes contribute to such phenomena as river flooding and soil erosion. They are developing some sense of the fragility of the natural environment and of the importance of attempting to conserve it and prevent damage occurring whenever possible.
- Some more able pupils are able to engage in vigorous, challenging and lively debate in response to such problem-solving activities as why an ex-miner should be building a Japanese restaurant in Bridgend.

#### ***Sixth-form***

- Students are active learners in lessons and engage well in dialogue with their teachers, which they often initiate.
- Students are well informed as to current world and more local news issues and use them intelligently to deepen their understanding of geography.
- Students have good understanding of some complex processes such as the relationship between the levels of discharge shown on a flood hydrograph and rainfall and can analyse and interpret complex graphs and diagrams.
- Students have good understanding of the dynamics of population growth and of the impact of changes in the birth rate and death rate on economic development.

#### **Shortcomings**

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

- Pupils with SEN do not have good recall of much of what they have written and their understanding of it is limited. Pupils of high ability are under-challenged by much of their work and their achievement is less than it could be.
- Pupils do very little independent writing - most of what they write is heavily dependent on text copied from textbooks or the board and as a consequence there appears little difference across the ability range.
- Pupils' skills such as the use and interpretation of maps, diagrams and data are not significantly developed in KS4.
- Very few pupils attain the highest grades in the GCSE examination.

##### ***Sixth-form***

- Students do not do sufficient independent writing and research.

Since the last inspection in KS3 and KS4 pupils' knowledge and use of geographical vocabulary has improved and their understanding of processes and relationships through case studies has improved. However, pupils' use of more extended written work is still limited. Pupils are developing independent thought through recent use of problem solving exercises.

## **Modern foreign languages**

Standards of achievement in French are good in KS3 and KS4. The subject is not taught in the sixth-form this year. In 2002 the relatively few pupils entered for GCSE examinations all gained a pass grade and achievement of grades A\*-C, was an improvement on 2001. Students of French entered for A and AS level examinations all gained a pass grade. This is an improvement in standards since the last inspection.

### **Good features**

#### **KS3**

- Pupils enjoy their French lessons and respond with enthusiasm to the variety of language activities prepared for them.
- They hear fluent French spoken by the teacher throughout the lesson and, as a result, develop good, sometimes very good listening skills.
- They are keen to answer questions and to speak French in normal classroom exchanges with the teacher.
- The majority speak with a good accent and are confident when holding a short conversation with a stranger.
- Comprehension of texts in the course-book is good.
- By the end of Y9 most pupils write French using the past, present and future tenses effectively.
- Despite very restricted time pupils with SEN make satisfactory progress throughout KS3.

#### **KS4**

- Listening skills continue to be good. Pupils understand French spoken at a natural pace and identify details in language recorded on tape.
- They recall vocabulary well and speak confidently on topics prepared for the GCSE examination.
- Reading comprehension is good; pupils identify main points in authentic texts.
- Most pupils have a good grasp of the appropriate grammar and write with increasing accuracy.
- More able pupils produce written coursework of a good standard. They use a wide range of vocabulary and idiom.

### **Shortcomings**

#### **KS3**

- More able pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to write at length. Written tasks lack challenge.

#### ***KS4***

- In Y11 the majority of pupils lack confidence when speaking in unrehearsed situations.

The department has made good progress since the last inspection, and standards have improved.

### **Art**

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

At the end of KS3 the majority of pupils are achieving to the national expected level. In the GCSE examination a higher percentage of pupils are entered for art than the national average and the percentage of pupils achieving grades A\*-C is significantly better than the national average. In the most recent A level examination, the majority of students achieved grades A to C.

#### **Good features**

##### ***KS3***

- From imaginative group exercises pupils know how to use colour well.
- They know how to draw, paint and print to a good standard.
- They develop good craft skills in three-dimensional sculpture and ceramics.
- They use the myths and legends of Wales to spark their own imaginations.
- They understand how an artist works through projects with visiting local artists.
- They use annotation well to support their practical work.
- They use computers creatively and as a research tool.
- Pupils with SEN achieve well due to the good quality individual attention they receive.

##### ***KS4***

- Pupils develop good drawing and painting skills.
- Pupils develop good three-dimensional craft skills making vibrant large-scale masks.
- Sketchbooks are used well to research and develop their ideas.
- Pupils understand how to improve their work due to the frequent teacher review and self-assessment of their work.
- Pupils use computer scanners creatively.
- Pupils with lower than average abilities achieve well and make good progress.
- When writing about art, pupils are beginning to express their personal opinions.

##### ***Sixth-form***

- Students show good craft skills when drawing and painting.
- They use colour expressively and with much individual flair.
- They work imaginatively in large-scale painting and sculpture.
- They use the techniques of different artists and designers to inform their own work.
- They use computers well to create art and to find out about different artists.
- From visiting art galleries they have a breadth of knowledge of historical art.
- From working with artists-in-residence they have a good knowledge of contemporary art.

## **Shortcomings**

### ***KS3***

- Pupils do not explore the art of other cultures in their practical work.
- When drawing, too many pupils automatically turn to a photograph rather than looking at the actual object.
- Pupils' knowledge of art is limited by the lack of opportunity to visit art galleries.
- Pupils are not required to talk about art sufficiently and this limits their development of a good art vocabulary.

### ***KS4***

- Poor attendance by some pupils results in their achieving lower examination grades than they are capable of.
- Pupils' ability to develop digital camera work is frustrated by unreliable systems.
- Pupils restrict themselves to single word answers and do not talk confidently about art.
- Pupils' knowledge of artists is limited by insufficient books on them in the library.

### ***Sixth-form***

- When writing or talking about art, students do not give sufficient attention to saying what they see, think and feel.

Since the previous report, there has been good progress. Standards have risen and the numbers choosing art have grown.

## **Music**

Standards of achievement in music are good in KS3 and KS4. There are no timetabled classes in music in the sixth-form. GCSE results in 2002 were in line with the national average. The five A level candidates in 2002 gained good pass grades.

### **Good features**

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

- Pupils in KS3 sing with a pleasing tone, clarity of diction and secure rhythm and pitch.
- Many pupils display appropriate finger technique on keyboards and play suitably differentiated parts in classroom ensemble with a good degree of accuracy. Most pupils maintain secure ensemble when performing together.
- Many "sound pictures" composed by Y7 and Y8 pupils show imaginative use of resources. Some melodic work and improvisations by Y9 pupils are well shaped and rhythmically interesting.
- Pupils focus their listening well in practical activities. Oral responses when appraising are often confident, show a clear understanding of technical terms and an awareness of musical elements.
- In KS4, pupils in Y10 and Y11, make suitable progress in vocal and instrumental tuition and achieve well for their differing abilities.
- Many pupils produce good work in the "common" composing tasks undertaken. Settings of "Hey, Mr Railway Man" by Y11 and a few Christmas songs by Y10 pupils have well shaped melodic lines and demonstrate a good understanding of chords and structure.

- Standards of appraising music, although uneven, are satisfactory, overall. Most pupils are developing a sound vocabulary of technical terms. More able pupils are able to discern technical and expressive features well in music from different styles and periods.
- Pupils with SEN achieve good standards for their abilities in both key stages.

### **Shortcomings**

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

- A few pupils in KS3 are not always able to play in time with others in ensemble performance.
- Improvisations, by certain Y9 pupils, lack coherence and a sense of direction.
- A few lower ability pupils in KS4 have yet to adequately develop initial ideas in composing.
- The appraising skills of certain middle and lower ability pupils are not evenly developed across a range of musical contexts.

Good vocal and instrumental tuition, provided for one in ten of the pupils on roll, and pupil involvement in extra-curricular activities have a positive affect on standards in the subject. Since the last inspection standards have improved in KS3 and have been consolidated in KS4.

### **Physical education**

Standards at both KS3 and KS4 are good. There are no timetabled lessons for the sixth-form. Standards for GCSE physical education are satisfactory; because of examinations no advanced level classes were seen during the Inspection.

Long term illness has meant that since September 2002, two of the three teaching posts in the department are covered by supply teachers

### **Good features**

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

- Most pupils respond enthusiastically, are attentive and enjoy participating in the different activity areas.
- Pupils apply themselves to activities and tasks conscientiously as individuals and they work together well in pairs and groups in response to the tasks set.
- Individually or in groups they are able to practice, review, and refine actions to improve personal or group performance.
- Pupils unable to participate in practical lessons are constructively involved in recording and reviewing the work of their peers.
- In the major games a number of pupils show very good levels of skill, and the majority of pupils demonstrate appropriate tactical awareness.
- In Y7 girls with very limited previous experience make good progress in dance.
- Pupils respond well to instruction from their teachers.
- Classes respond well to the question and answer sessions at the start and end of each lesson which are used productively to recall links with past lessons, set aims and review the current lesson.
- Pupils with SEN achieve good standards relative to ability.

## **Shortcomings**

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

- Pupils do not consistently demonstrate good quality in movement and techniques.
- Pupils do not contribute sufficiently to discussions in GCSE lessons.
- Many of the GCSE folders are poorly organised.

Standards have improved since the last inspection

## **Religious education**

Standards of achievement are good in KS3 and KS4, with some very good aspects. The A\*-C results for the GCSE Short Course followed as the statutory religious education programme for KS4 are very good, and are above the UA and Wales averages, particularly in view of the large percentage of the cohort entered.

### **Good features**

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

- Pupils gain good knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other religions.
- Pupils generally know essential facts about worship and celebrations, sacred texts and traditions, as well as learning about key figures in religion.
- All pupils display sensitivity to religious issues, and to the beliefs and values of others.
- Across all levels of ability, pupils enjoy and are well motivated towards the subject, and this enables good learning and progress to take place.
- Pupils with SEN show very good standards of achievement.
- Pupils learn and regularly use key words, as well as developing their ability and confidence in expressing views and opinions along with explanations and reasons.
- Pupils make progress through engaging constructively in a wide range of learning activities and this positively contributes to their progress, and to their growing awareness of religious symbolism, and of questions and issues raised by religion and by human experience.
- Pupils evaluate their own and others' work accurately.

### **Shortcomings**

- Some pupils have an insufficient understanding about the impact of beliefs on lifestyle, particularly at KS3.
- In some classes at KS4, pupils' responses to questions, concerns and issues lack sufficient depth of understanding.

This is good progress since the last inspection.

## **Religious studies**

Standards are good in the GCSE Religious Studies and the AS and A level courses. Examination results were low in 2002, although the value added tables indicate positive progress at GCSE.

### **Good features**

#### ***KS4 GCSE course***

- Pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of the content of the course.
- The majority of pupils demonstrate familiarity with the key terms and concepts of the course
- Pupils are able to discuss issues of belief and practice, and are developing well the skills of presenting written accounts and evaluative work.
- They regularly evaluate their own and others' work, and increase their own performance as a result.
- Gifted and talented pupils take the opportunity to attend additional out of hours learning; the work covered does extend these pupils' understanding and skills.

#### ***Sixth-form***

- The majority of students have a very good grasp of the subject matter , especially in the work on Buddhism. These pupils demonstrate, orally in class and in written work, a depth of knowledge and understanding that is impressive.
- Pupils give very good attention to presenting information and argument, both orally and in written work, including very good use of ICT skills in group presentations.
- Pupils regularly evaluate answers to help improve their standards and performance.

### **Shortcomings**

- A small number of pupils in the Y12 and Y13 group whose knowledge and interrogation of the subject matter was less secure.

Standards have improved since the last inspection

## **Personal social and health education**

Standards at KS3 and KS4 are good. No sixth-form lessons took place during the inspection.

### **Good features**

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

- Pupils engage sensibly in tasks, discussions and group work.
- Pupils make progress in their knowledge and understanding, and learn through well planned activities and discussion.
- The majority of pupils respond maturely and sensibly to sensitive personal and moral issues.

- Pupils respond well to question and answer sessions at the start of lessons designed to recall previous work and to set out the aims for the current lesson. They contribute fully to a closing review of lessons.
- Pupils listen to contributions respectfully and speak freely and with confidence.
- They respond well to specialist teaching in areas such as careers and sex education.
- All pupils respond to self-evaluation questionnaires carefully and seriously.

### **Shortcomings**

- In some lessons a small minority of pupils may be off task.
- Less able pupils are sometimes unable to gain full benefit from lessons that contain too many activities.

### **Business studies (Sixth-form)**

Standards of achievement are good. Very good results were achieved in the A level examination with all candidates gaining A or B grades.

### **Good features**

- Most students make good progress and have a good knowledge and understanding of key concepts.
- They work methodically and logically, thinking carefully about tasks, selecting relevant information and asking questions to confirm their understanding of ethical and unethical business practices.
- The majority of pupils display a good knowledge and understanding of the business environment in which businesses operate and of the influence it has on business behaviour.
- Average and more able pupils analyse data well and apply their knowledge effectively to real life situations.
- They can organise and present arguments clearly and concisely as demonstrated by their work on the ways innovation and change can affect the operation of all businesses.

### **Shortcomings**

- Lower ability students are not selective enough in their choice of information to substantiate an argument.
- They also provide too much description in written work, at the expense of analysis.

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

## **Vocational education**

### **Health and Social Care - GCSE**

This is a new course. Standards in Year 10 are good.

#### **Good features**

- Pupils are developing sound knowledge and understanding of factors affecting the health and development of different client groups.
- They are able to research independently, into individual health and lifestyle conditions and make informed judgements and opinions.
- Completed projects are well written and demonstrate a good awareness of the provision of local Health and Social care services and the roles of professionals.
- Overall ICT is used effectively to present work.
- Pupils participate well in class activities and share information in a co-operative way.

#### **Shortcomings**

- The computer spell-check facility is not always used, so that errors are not corrected.

### **Intermediate**

Standards are satisfactory. Recent examination results are satisfactory.

#### **Good features**

- Students demonstrate a sound understanding of the structure and function of health care services and its availability to the community.
- They are able to identify different life stages and a range of factors that affect personal development.
- They successfully interview clients, carry out a good depth of analysis, record potential risks to their health and set appropriate targets for improvement.
- Folio work is quite well written and presentation is supported by good use of ICT.

#### **Shortcomings**

- Not all information recorded relates to the case study client.
- Evaluation of the choice of health promotion material lacks detail and justification of how it will support the suggested health plan.

Progress since the last inspection has been maintained.

### **Advanced level**

Standards are good. Recent examination results are satisfactory at A level and good at AS level.

## **Good features**

- Students display good knowledge and understanding of the key concepts of health and social care.
- They carry out in-depth analysis into the provision of services and the role of professional carers and make informed judgements as to how they affect individuals and the community.
- Students are able to research independently and record information from a variety of sources including visits and work placements.
- In the classroom situation, Y13 students discuss issues such as complimentary therapies confidently and use subject specific terminology accurately.
- Communication skills are developed well through personal interaction with a range of clients and through extended report writing.
- Written work is carried out to a good depth with a number of students able to form and present coherent, logical opinions and evaluations.
- Completed unit assignments range from satisfactory to very good with competent ICT skills used for research, analysis and presentation.
- Good review procedures and tutor feedback enable students to make good progress.

## **Shortcomings**

- A good proportion of Y12 students are passive and reluctant to participate orally in whole class discussion sessions.

This subject was not studied at this level at the time of the last inspection.

## **Others**

### **Food Studies (Entry level)**

This subject has been re-introduced into the curriculum this academic year. Currently, a group of Y10 pupils are following this course at Entry level. Standards of achievement are satisfactory.

## **Good features**

- Pupils show a basic understanding of healthy eating principles and factors affecting food choice, in the planning of breakfasts and buffet foods.
- Making skills are good, pupils organise their work well and use tools and equipment confidently and reasonably competently.
- Pupils are aware of health and safety procedures and generally follow these.
- They gain valuable experience when they prepare food items for school events and show considerable interest and commitment to their practical work.
- Evaluation skills are developing in activities to taste a range of food products.

## Shortcomings

- Written work varies in depth and quality and there is incomplete work in a number of pupils' files.
- Some pupils have difficulty in recalling previous work and are unsure of the nutritional value of the foods they are using.
- A minority of pupils are unable to work independently.

## 8. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

### 8.1 Progress since the last inspection

1. *improve attendance rates by reinforcing strategies recently developed, as part of a school target to reduce prolonged and intermittent absence by many pupils, and thereby improve the continuity and quality of learning and standards of achievement;*

Attendance is now satisfactory. The many strategies employed by the school have been very successful to the degree that the full term before this inspection average attendance for statutory age pupils had risen to 90%. Attendance was below 80% at the time of the last Inspection. The school has now set itself a target to achieve 92% attendance by 2004. Very good progress has been made.

2. *improve standards of basic numeracy by strengthening key stage 2 to key stage 3 curriculum continuity and progression, developing and implementing an appropriate whole school strategy and putting increased emphasis on number fluency from year 7;*

Improvement in key skills is a clear focus in the school development plan, and all subjects contribute to this improvement, which is carefully monitored by the numeracy co-ordinator. There have been clear improvements, and standards in numeracy across the school are now good overall.

3. *strengthen the spiritual development of pupils through fulfilling the statutory requirements to provide a daily act of collective worship and religious education for all pupils throughout the school and improving the quality and use of the form tutor period;*

The school does not meet the requirements to provide all pupils with a daily collective act of worship, and Y12 and Y13 students do not study religious education. This key issue has not been addressed.

4. *further improve the quality of learning in some classes through the provision of materials that match the needs of all pupils, more enquiry and practical work, more extended responses when speaking and writing, and an increased variety and pace of activities;*

Following the last inspection the school audited provision and used available funding to improve the availability of resources matched to changes in teaching and learning needs. The range and variety of teaching techniques used have improved and are now

good overall and the match of learning to the ability of pupils is now at least satisfactory in all subjects and is good in about half. There are, however some instances where further improvement is needed. Most pupils are now confident speakers. and appropriate use is made of enquiry and practical work.

5. *review the roles of the senior management team to enable the deputy headteachers to spend more of their time working at a strategic level, to tackle whole school issues, rather than on day-to-day matters;*

The Leadership Group has been restructured to give clear strategic roles to the deputy head and three assistant heads. This has contributed positively to the management and delivery of school improvement over recent years.

6. *extend the use of information technology in the subjects across the curriculum to give pupils greater opportunities to apply and develop skills;*

The standard of achievement in cross-curricular ICT skills is now satisfactory. Pupils are now using a wider range of ICT across a number of subject areas and subjects have identified the use of ICT in their schemes of work.

7. *further enhance the provision for pupils with special educational needs by developing individual educational programmes for all pupils for whom they are required, and providing extra in-class support for low attainers where necessary;*

All pupils on the register for pupils with special educational needs have individual education plans. These are thoroughly prepared, disseminated to all staff and reviewed regularly. There has been improvement and some additional curricular support is provided for low attaining pupils not in the Learning Support classes.

8. *increase the use made of assessments, particularly in marked work, to aid pupils' progress and improve standards;*

The school has recently introduced an Assessment for Learning policy that emphasises the supportive marking of work. This policy, implemented to promote achievement has not been in place long enough for its impact to be judged fairly. At present the quality of marking varies between departments. In addition the school now makes good use of technology for the regular collection and reporting of assessments.

9. *further improve the quality of reports to parents so that subject comments identify strengths and weaknesses in skills and set targets for future development; widen the scope of pupils' records at school level to include this and other information to help in the monitoring of pupils' progress;*

The leadership group now checks reports for quality before publication and copies are now kept within pupil files. Most subject reports now indicate areas for improvement, and parents receive additional snap-shot reports during the year.

10. *increase the degree of involvement by parents in the life of the school.*

The Pupil Performance Reviews held during the school day for all year groups have been successful in attracting some 90% of parents. Other worthy attempts by the school to increase the number of parents involved in the school have met with limited success. There is an active but small PTA

## **8.2 Key issues for action**

The school has not addressed a key issue identified in the 1996 inspection report. The failure to meet the requirement to provide all pupils with a daily act of collective worship, and statutory religious education in the sixth-form therefore remains a key issue.

To continue improvement the school should:

- ensure that all departments provide appropriate challenge and have high expectations for pupils of all abilities in all classes,
- monitor and evaluate both the consistent implementation and the outcomes of the new Assessment for Learning Policy so as to achieve the desired improvements in learning,
- ensure that all pupils with SEN receive the support they need,
- use the detailed data analysis at the school to further refine the target setting for subjects and individual pupils and
- continue the very good work on improving attendance so as to meet the targets the school has set for itself.

### *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	Rhymney Comprehensive School
School type	Secondary
Age -range of pupils	11-18 years
Address of school	Abertysswg Rhymney
Post-Code	NP22 5XF
Telephone Number	01685 846900

Headteacher	Mr JB Hogan
Date of appointment	1 September 1988
Chair of Governors/ Appropriate Authority	Mr J Bevan
Registered Inspector	Mr TA O'Marah
Dates of inspection	27-31 January 2003

### B. School data and indicators

<i>Number of pupils in each year group</i>									
Year group	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13	Y14	Total
Number of pupils	155	135	149	156	121	45	29		790

<i>Total number of teachers</i>			
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time equivalent (fte)
Number of teachers	44	4	46.4

<i>Staffing information</i>	
Pupil:teacher (fte) ratio (excluding special classes)	17.02 : 1
Pupil:adult (fte) ratio in special classes	12:1
Average teaching group size	22.4
Overall contact ratio	76%

<i>Percentage attendance for three complete terms prior to the inspection</i>								
	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13	Whole school
Spring 02	91	89	87	87	91	89		89
Summer 02	89	86	86	87	88	86		87
Autumn 01	95	91	89	88	93	87		91

Percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals	28
Number of pupils excluded during 12 months prior to inspection	0

## C. Results of National Curriculum assessments and public examinations

<b>National Curriculum Assessment KS3 results: 2002</b>																
Total number of pupils in Y9: 157																
<b>Percentage of pupils at each level</b>																
			D	A	N	B	W	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8+	
EN	Teacher assessment	School	0	1	0		0	1	3	10	25	34	16	10	0	
		National	0	1	1		0	0	3	10	22	34	21	8	0	
	Test	School	0	1	0	6					10	27	33	16	7	
		National	0	3	2	2					9	22	33	19	10	
MA	Teacher assessment	School	0	1	0		0	1	3	12	22	29	20	12	0	
		National	0	1	0		0	0	1	10	23	25	26	13	1	
	Test	School	0	5	1	0					13	25	24	20	12	
		National	0	6	1	1					8	22	22	27	13	
SC	Teacher assessment	School	0	1	0		0	0	1	11	27	38	15	7	0	
		National	0	1	1		0	0	1	10	24	31	23	9	0	
	Test	School	0	4	1	0					15	25	31	17	7	
		National	0	4	1	1					9	22	29	24	10	

<b>Percentage of pupils attaining at least level 5 in mathematics, science and either English or Welsh (first language)</b>			
<b>by Teacher Assessment</b>		<b>by Test</b>	
In the school:	50	In the school:	43
In Wales:	52	In Wales:	50

D - Pupils exempted or disapplied under Section 364 and 365 of the Education Act 1996

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

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

B - Pupils not entered for the tests because they are working outside the set level of the tests

W - Pupils who are working towards level 1

<b>For pupils aged 15, results in GCSE, CoE, GNVQ and NVQ</b>			
Number of pupils aged 15 on the school roll in January 2001: 135			
<b>The percentage of 15 year old pupils who in 2002:</b>			
	School	UA	Wales
were entered for 5 or more GCSEs	79	84	86
achieved 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C	37	43	50
achieved 5 or more GCSE grades A*-G	79	82	85
achieved GCSE grades A*-C in each of mathematics, science, English or Welsh first language)	28	30	37
entered at least one CoE, GCSE short course or GCSE	96	96	97
achieved one or more GCSE grades A*-C	59	66	74
achieved one or more GCSE grades A*-G	89	90	92
achieved no graded GCSE	11	10	8
achieved one or more CoE only	4	4	3
achieved a GNVQ Part 1, a GNVQ at Foundation level or NVQ level 1	-		
achieved a GNVQ Part 1, a GNVQ at Intermediate level or NVQ level 2	-		
achieved at least 5 GCSE grades A* to C, the equivalent vocational qualifications or a combination of both	37		
achieved at least 5 GCSE grades A* to G, the equivalent vocational qualifications or a combination of both	79		

<b>For pupils aged 16, 17 and 18, results in A/AS, GNVQs and NVQs</b>			
Number of pupils aged 16, 17 and 18 in January 2002: 43			
Number of pupils entered for 2 or more GCE A level examinations or equivalent in 2002: 35			
Number of pupils entered for fewer than 2 GCE A levels or equivalent in 2002: 8			
	School	UA	Wales
Percentage of pupils entered who achieved 2 or more grades A-C	51	60	66
Percentage of pupils entered who achieved 2 or more grades A-E	91	93	94
Average points score per candidate	17	18	20
Number of pupils who achieved a GNVQ Intermediate or NVQ at level 2	2	-	-
Number of pupils who achieved a GNVQ Advanced or NVQ at level 3	-	-	-

## **D. The evidence base of the inspection**

In total 204 classes were inspected. Other activities – form periods, registration, assemblies, and clubs were also observed. Most teachers were seen teaching several times and there were planned interviews with the head, deputy head, assistant heads, heads of departments, heads of year as well as many teachers and other staff at the school.

Inspectors had organised meetings with representative groups of pupils as well as talking to them in lessons and around the school. Written and other work was scrutinised collectively and in the separate subjects.

The registered inspector held pre-inspection meetings with the staff of the school, the governing body and parents to explain the inspection process and to ask for their views and opinions on all aspects of the work of the school. Some 90 questionnaires were returned by parents and the analysis of these, together with views collected at the various meetings was used to inform the inspection.

The documentation collected from the school prior to the inspection was analysed both before and during the inspection and was used to inform the planning of the inspection and meetings of the inspection team.

## E. Composition and responsibilities of the inspection team

Team member	Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Mr TA O'Marah Registered Inspector	Physical Education Personal and Social Education	Context; main findings; standards achieved in subjects and areas of learning; standards achieved in key skills across the curriculum; teaching; quality of self-evaluation and planning for improvement; leadership and efficiency; staffing, accommodation and learning resources; progress since the last inspection, key issues for action
Dr MHL Snow Lay Inspector		Behaviour and attitudes; attendance; partnerships with parents and community, schools and other institutions; partnership with industry
SG Davies Core Team	Science co-ordinator (physics)	Curriculum; support leadership and efficiency
JE James Core Team	English	Support, guidance and pupils' welfare; support leadership and efficiency. Sixth-form co-ordination
Dr E Price-Jones Core Team	Mathematics	Assessment, recording and reporting
PM Rourke Core Team	Geography	Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. SEN
GP Craigen	Religious education/Religious studies	
Dr WA Evans	Science (biology)	
E Forster	Art	
ME Herbert	Design and technology Food studies Health and social care	
GM Holland	Modern foreign languages	
AW Jones	Music	
T Lewis	Welsh	
HR Powell	History	
SP Rowland	Science support (chemistry)	
Dr. JK Watson	Design and technology co-ordinator Information technology Computing	
D Williams	Business studies	