

**Inspection under Section 28 of the
Education Act 2005**

A Report on the Quality of Education in

**Castell Alun High School
Fagl Lane
Hope
LL12 9PY**

School Number: 6644017

Date of Inspection: 19/11/07

by

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17193**

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Castell Alun High School was inspected as part of a national programme of school inspection. The purpose of inspection is to identify good features and shortcomings in schools in order that they may improve the quality of education offered and raise the standards achieved by their pupils. The inspection of all schools within a six-year cycle is also designed to give parents information about the performance of their child's school.

The inspection of Castell Alun High School took place between 19/11/07 and 22/11/07. An independent team of inspectors, led by Terence Andrew O'Marah undertook the inspection. Estyn, a statutory body independent of, but funded by, the National Assembly for Wales, commissioned the inspection.

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

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

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

There are three types of inspection.

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

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

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

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

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

This school received a **standard** inspection.

Year groups and key stages

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

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

Primary phase:

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

Secondary phase:

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

The National Curriculum covers four key stages as follows:

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

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A glossary of terms used in this report

Careers education and guidance	A planned programme to teach pupils about career opportunities and to provide each pupil with individual career guidance.
Core subject indicator (CSI)	<p>For key stage 3: The percentage of pupils gaining at least level 5 in each of the core subjects.</p> <p>For key stage 4: The percentage of pupils gaining grade 'C' or better in the GCSE examinations in each of the core subjects.</p>
Core Subjects	English or Welsh, science and mathematics.
Key skills	Important common skills necessary for learning, such as communication skills, number skills, information and communication technology skills, and bilingual competence.
Learning Pathways	Developments in the curriculum for learners aged 14 to 19, which offer a range of courses and teaching methods appropriate for young people's varying needs. These courses may involve links with other schools, colleges and other providers.
Learning support assistants	Trained assistants, who work alongside qualified teachers in the classroom. They may work with an individual pupil or a group of pupils.
National Curriculum	The subjects, and subject content, that all maintained schools must provide for all pupils.
National Curriculum assessment	For secondary schools, this is the assessment of pupils at the end of key stage 3 in English or Welsh, science and mathematics. In key stage 4, this is provided through a range of approved qualifications, the most common of these being the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE).
Public examinations	Nationally recognised examinations commonly taken at 16 years of age and 18 years of age (usually GCSE and Advanced level (A level)).
Pupils with additional learning needs	Pupils who, for a wide range of reasons, have been identified as needing additional or modified support to help them learn successfully.
Pupils with special educational needs	Those pupils, within the overall category of additional learning needs, who need specific support, which, for pupils with complex needs, may be recorded within a statement of special educational needs.
Similar schools	All those secondary schools in Wales that have a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals. For this school that is 0 % and 10 %.

Statutory requirements

All of those aspects of school provision that the Welsh Assembly Government requires schools to provide.

Vocational studies (courses)

Courses of study related to career or employment skills.

Work related education

Teaching pupils about the nature of life in the workplace.

Context

The nature of the provider

- 1 Castell Alun High School is a co-educational 11 to 18 English medium community comprehensive school situated in the village of Hope, Flintshire. There are currently 1,233 pupils and students on roll compared with 1,217 at the time of the previous inspection in 2002. Of these 219 are in the sixth form; this is an increase of 38% since 2002.
- 2 The school serves a large number of rural communities with most students coming from English speaking homes. There is, however, a rich and balanced mix of English and Welsh culture, which is reflected in the ethos of the school. Below 1% are from minority ethnic groups.
- 3 A full range of abilities is represented in the school. For the 2007-2008 academic year, 13% of pupils are identified on the school's Additional Learning Needs Register and 1.4% have a Statement of Additional Learning Needs. Some 5% of pupils are entitled to free school meals.
- 4 The school is committed to further development by providing quality learning experiences and promoting high expectations whilst recognising and celebrating success for all.

The school's priorities and targets

- 5 The school's Mission Statement and Code of Conduct are focused on a commitment to mutual respect within a civilised and caring learning community.
- 6 Whole school priorities each year focus upon five key aspects:
 - teaching and learning;
 - leadership and management;
 - training and development;
 - student development; and
 - community and environment.
- 7 The principle of continuous improvement underpins the school's development planning within a culture of self-evaluation and sharing of good practice.

Summary

- 8 In its mission statement, the school states that it is committed to "high quality learning experiences for all". It has clearly met this commitment. Staff at all levels throughout the school work hard and successfully to ensure the best possible outcomes for the young people in their care. The response of pupils and students is demonstrated by their high levels of attendance, excellent behaviour and attitudes, and their very good academic and personal achievements. The school has many outstanding features.

Table of grades awarded

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

- 9 The school has improved on the good standards reported at the previous inspection in 2002. The grades in the above table indicate that Castell Alun is a highly successful school with many outstanding features. The school, in its self-evaluation report, awarded itself a grade 1 for key questions 3, 4, 5 and 7, and a grade 2 for key questions 1, 2, and 6.

Standards

Grades for standards in subjects inspected

The following table shows the standards achieved in the six subjects of the curriculum inspected:

Subject	Key Stage 3	Key stage 4	Post 16
Mathematics	2	2	2
Science	2	2	2
Information technology	2	2	1
History	2	1	1
Religious education	1	1	1
Drama	N/A	2	1

(For an explanation of the grades, please see the beginning of the report)

The standards achieved in the six subjects of the curriculum inspected.

78 lessons	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
Key stage 3	16%	75%	9%	0%	0%
Key stage 4	33%	50%	17%	0%	0%
Key stage 3 and 4	23%	65%	12%	0%	0%
Post 16	33%	67%	0%	0%	0%
Whole school	26%	65%	9%	0%	0%

(For an explanation of the grades, please see the beginning of the report)

- 10 The standards achieved exceed the targets for achievement in lessons set by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) for both 2007 and 2010, and are also significantly higher than the average reported by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) for all those schools in Wales inspected in 2005/2006. Over a quarter of lessons have outstanding features.
- 11 The standards seen in lessons, and the overall performance of subjects are improvements on the good standards reported in the previous inspection in 2002.
- 12 National Curriculum assessments in key stage 3 compare well with similar schools and are consistently and significantly above local and national averages. Girls, however, achieve much better than boys in English.
- 13 In the GCSE examinations, results are also significantly above local and national averages and compare well with similar schools. The proportion of girls who gain five or more higher grades is significantly higher than that of the boys.
- 14 Results at advanced level (A level) are above local averages and are comparable with national averages.
- 15 Four fifths of students complete their A level courses, and of these around three quarters proceed to higher education.
- 16 Pupils' and students' listening skills are very good. They have good skills in reading, writing, and speaking. Their number skills are good as are their information technology skills, which they use to support their work across the curriculum and in their personal studies.
- 17 In many lessons pupils and students demonstrate outstanding learning ability. They carry out detailed research, analyse information in detail, extract information from complex texts and can give valid reasons for different perspectives on a range of issues. They show commitment and concentration.
- 18 In the lessons where there were shortcomings, pupils often failed to concentrate throughout the lesson and, as a result, their progress was limited. In these lessons, teaching was over prescriptive or lacked sufficient pace.
- 19 The development of pupils' and students' personal, social and learning skills is outstanding. They are well motivated and want to succeed. They confidently take on responsibilities, regularly engage in charitable work and are appreciative of the very good range of extra-curricular activities the school offers.
- 20 Behaviour in lessons and around the school is outstandingly good, as are levels of attendance.
- 21 Pupils and students show very good understanding of issues of equal opportunities and are sensitive towards diversity within society.
- 22 Across the school, pupils and students have good problem solving skills and are frequently creative in the development of their ideas.

- 23 Their ability to work productively with others is outstanding in almost all instances.
- 24 All pupils and students are well prepared for moving on to the next stage of their education or training.

The quality of education and training

- 25 The following table shows the quality of teaching and assessment in the lessons observed during the inspection:

163 lessons	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
KS3	15%	79%	6%	0%	0%
KS4	33%	52%	15%	0%	0%
KS3 and KS4	23%	67%	10%	0%	0%
Post 16	35%	60%	5%	0%	0%
Whole school	26%	65%	9%	0%	0%

(for an explanation of the grades, please refer to the beginning of the report)

- 26 These figures are an improvement on the good standards achieved in the previous inspection. They are significantly higher than the average reported by HMCI for all those schools inspected in 2005/2006, and exceed the WAG target set for 2010.
- 27 Overall, in a quarter of the lessons seen, the teaching and assessment had outstanding features, and less than 1 lesson in 10 had any shortcomings. Examples of the outstanding features were a challenging pace in lessons, high quality planning, precise and appropriate timing of tasks, positive and constructive relationships and the teachers' high levels of subject knowledge.
- 28 A further two-thirds of lessons had no important shortcomings. These lessons shared many of the features listed above, but to a lesser degree. In all these lessons assessment and constructive feedback had a significant impact on learners' progress.
- 29 The consistency and quality of day-to-day marking and of the written comments by teachers are outstanding.
- 30 The school maintains a detailed database on pupils' and students' progress, performance and personal development, which is used by teachers to monitor progress and to manage support for those who need it. Its range, quality and the impact it has on raising pupils' achievements are outstanding.
- 31 Annual reports to parents are very informative, and there is outstanding consistency in the quality of comments made in them by teachers.
- 32 The curriculum meets statutory requirements and offers both breadth and balance. Vocational courses are developing in key stage 4, but the school has not yet fully investigated all opportunities in the 14 to 19 Learning Pathways initiative. The post 16 curriculum offers a good range of advanced supplementary (AS) and advanced level (A2) courses. Links with a local college ensure that close to 90% of students stay in education beyond 16.

- 33 All the key skills are effectively promoted throughout the school, and Y12 students will be entered for accreditation in these in 2008. Some further work is needed to enhance the teaching of numeracy.
- 34 Learning and social experiences for all are significantly enriched by an outstanding programme of extra-curricular activities.
- 35 Learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good with outstanding features. These attributes are developed through discussion in the classroom, participation in group activities, and in a range of additional learning experiences.
- 36 The partnerships with parents, the community and primary schools are good with some outstanding features. Parents receive high quality information, there are excellent community activities, and transition links with primary schools make the move to the high school a positive and successful experience.
- 37 Pupils and students receive good work-related education and careers guidance. All members of Y10 and Y12 undertake well organised work experience.
- 38 The provision for the development of pupils' bilingual skills is outstanding. This is realised through both school and extra-curricular activities.
- 39 Pupils and students are involved in extensive charity activities each year.
- 40 The quality of care, support and assistance (to pupils and students) has outstanding features. These include the induction programmes for Y7 pupils, relationships with parents, the community and primary schools, and the monitoring of learners' progress across all subjects.
- 41 When there is cause for concern, parents/guardians of those involved are contacted and usually targets for improvement are mutually agreed.
- 42 The school has very effective procedures for dealing with potential instances of bullying, and there are good procedures to ensure the well-being of pupils and students.
- 43 There is good support for pupils with special educational needs, and these pupils make good progress. The paired reading scheme has outstanding success in improving the reading skills of Y7 pupils. At the end of key stage 4, all gain some GCSE accreditation.
- 44 The school achieves outstanding success in enabling pupils with emotional problems or challenging behaviour to come to better terms with their difficulty.
- 45 The quality of provision for equal opportunities is outstanding. Relationships between adults and learners are a very strong feature of the school's ethos. The school is successful in creating a climate where discrimination or unpleasant attitude of any sort is not tolerated.
- 46 The school provides good and often outstanding education for all its pupils whatever their abilities or needs.

Leadership and management

- 47 In its mission statement the school commits itself to providing high quality learning experiences and expectations, continuous improvement and opportunities to experience, recognise and celebrate success for all. It is very successful in meeting these commitments.
- 48 The headteacher and his senior colleagues provide the school with outstanding leadership. They have high expectations of their own performance and that of teachers, pupils and students. The core values of the school are widely shared and consistently applied at all levels.
- 49 There is good, and frequently outstanding leadership at all levels of management. There is rigorous attention to detail, which is an important factor in ensuring that expectations are met.
- 50 All the required policies are in place. These are applied consistently and very effectively in all parts of the school.
- 51 The school agrees appropriately challenging targets for attainment with the Unitary Authority (UA).
- 52 There is outstanding practice in the support and encouragement given to the continuing professional development of teachers at the school.
- 53 Managers at all levels have a clear understanding of the strengths and shortcomings of the areas of the school for which they have responsibility. There is a rigorous formal self-evaluation process, which is underpinned by a well developed ethos of personal responsibility and open discussions, consultations and meetings.
- 54 Detailed development planning evolves from the self-evaluation process. Regular reviews monitor progress against development plans. There is ample evidence that the whole process is successful in promoting continuous improvement. The school has made good progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous inspection report.
- 55 Governors have a thorough knowledge of the school and a strong understanding of their roles in its management. They provide a strong sense of identity and direction for the school.
- 56 The quality of the teaching staff, their qualifications, subject knowledge and expertise are strengths of the school.
- 57 The support provided by teaching assistants and non-teaching staff at the school makes a significant contribution to its success.
- 58 Accommodation, which is close to capacity, is sufficient for the number of pupils currently on roll. The school has a fresh and clean appearance, with good displays in classrooms and corridors. Facilities for drama are limited. The school grounds and buildings are kept litter free.

- 59 The provision of information and communication technology (ICT) equipment is a good feature. There is a very good supply of text books and other equipment.
- 60 The financial management of the school is exemplary. The school provides very good value for money.

Recommendations

- 61 In order to maintain its improvement, the school should:
- R1 continue to develop teaching and learning strategies in order to raise standards still further;
 - R2 continue to improve standards of achievement in the key skills;
 - R3 continue to seek ways of raising boys' attainment across the curriculum to the standards achieved by girls; and
 - R4 further develop the range of courses available within the 14 to 19 curriculum.

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

Standards

Key Question 1: How well do learners achieve?

Grade 1: Good with outstanding features

- 62 The grade awarded by the inspection team is higher than the grade the school awarded itself in its self-evaluation report (grade 2). The inspection team was able to take into account provisional examination results for 2007, and was impressed by the high standards of achievement seen in most lessons.

Key stage 3 and key stage 4

- 63 The following table shows the standards achieved in the six subjects of the curriculum inspected:

Subject	Key stage 3	Key stage 4
Mathematics	2	2
Science	2	2
Information technology	2	2
History	2	1
Religious education	1	1
Drama	N/A	2

(For an explanation of the grades, please see the beginning of the report)

- 64 When compared with the previous inspection, drama, history and religious education have improved in key stage 4, and in all others areas good standards have been maintained.
- 65 The standards that pupils achieved, at the different stages, in the six subjects inspected were:

57 lessons	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
Key stage 3	16%	75%	9%	0%	0%
Key stage 4	33%	50%	17%	0%	0%
Key stages 3 and 4	23%	65%	12%	0%	0%

(For an explanation of the grades, please see the beginning of the report)

- 66 The school has exceeded the targets set by the WAG for standards to be achieved by pupils in lessons by 2010. Standards have improved in both key stages since the previous inspection.
- 67 These standards are also significantly higher than the average reported by HMCI for all those schools in Wales inspected in 2005/2006. Across both key stages only 12% of observed lessons at Castell Alun had shortcomings, against the 32% reported by HMCI.

Pupils' success in attaining agreed learning goals

- 68 The overall ability of the current Y7 intake, as measured by key stage 2 National Curriculum assessments is above both the local and national averages.
- 69 In key stage 3, National Curriculum assessments for the core subjects and the core subject indicator (CSI) are consistently and significantly above both the national and local averages. In 2007, these results compared well with similar schools, particularly for mathematics and science. Results in the other National Curriculum subjects also compare well with similar schools, except for Welsh (second language), which does not. In 2007, in English, girls achieved significantly better than boys, the gap between them being greater than nationally. In mathematics and science this gap was small.
- 70 In key stage 4, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades at A* to C is consistently well above the local and national norms, and shows a trend for gradual improvement. The girls do significantly better than boys in gaining five or more higher grades, and they also gain a higher proportion of A* to C grades in each of the core subjects. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades A* to G is also consistently above the local and national average. Over the past six years, the performance of boys has improved markedly in English and mathematics, but has declined in science. Over the same period of time, girls' results in English and particularly in mathematics, have also improved. Their performance in science has shown improvement over the last three years. Results in the main indicators at GCSE compare well with similar schools, and very well for the CSI.
- 71 Value added data shows that good value is added between key stage 3 and key stage 4, but this is less marked between key stage 4 and the end of the post 16 stage.
- 72 The school undertakes a rigorous process to agree targets for attainment with the UA. This process is informed by the school's own assessments and the results of commercial standardised tests. The school successfully meets these targets which are reviewed annually.
- 73 Across the school, pupils with additional learning needs make good and often very good progress. The progress in developing their reading skills is often outstanding.
- 74 Pupils' listening skills are outstanding. They listen with respect and attention to teachers and to one another. Pupils willingly respond to questions in lessons and contribute enthusiastically to class discussions. They are often articulate and give extended responses. Pupils engage well in presentations in lessons. They adopt tone and language when required and use Standard English. There is a good understanding and use of a wide range of subject vocabulary.
- 75 Pupils reading skills are good. All read aloud with accuracy and fluency. The most able read with expression. There are opportunities for pupils to read a wide range of challenging texts. They do so with a very good understanding. Most develop good skills of interpreting and reading 'between the lines.' All pupils read for pleasure and show competent skills of research.

- 76 Writing skills are good. In both key stages there are examples of outstanding written work from able pupils. All write in a range of forms and for a variety of purposes and audiences. When required, all can extend their writing and organisation is usually good. Pupils with additional learning needs make good progress in the development of writing skills by the end of key stage 3. All pupils improve their writing standards by planning, drafting and proof reading.
- 77 Overall, the numerical skills of pupils in both key stages have good features and no important shortcomings. There is evidence in both key stages of good and very good standards. Pupils with additional learning needs receive good support. A small minority of pupils lack confidence in applying their numerical knowledge to varying situations in everyday life.
- 78 Pupils gain good information communication technology (ICT) skills in taught lessons at key stage 3 which are applied in all subjects across the curriculum. In the subjects inspected, the applications of ICT are good with no important shortcomings in history, religious education and science in both key stages. Good features outweigh shortcomings in mathematics in key stages 3 and 4, and in drama in key stage 4. Pupils have good access to computers outside lessons and are often directed by their teachers to use ICT to support their studies. The use of ICT to support pupils with additional learning needs is outstanding.
- 79 Standards in bilingual skills are good. Pupils' attitude to learning Welsh is positive. The increasing use of Welsh around the school and in subject areas is having a positive impact on pupils' bilingual competence.

Pupils' progress in learning

- 80 Almost a quarter of the lessons seen had outstanding features. Examples of these outstanding features were pupils' ability to:
- relate previous learning to their current work accurately and meaningfully;
 - weigh evidence from different sources against each other;
 - summarise information succinctly and accurately;
 - develop a hypothesis and pose meaningful questions;
 - collaborate with each other to solve problems;
 - analyse information well and use it to support their arguments; and
 - develop performance and presentation strategies.
- 81 In most other lessons, pupils had good recall of previous work, used technical vocabulary well and were able to maintain concentration on their work throughout the lesson. Their work was well presented, was almost always complete, and frequently contained extended writing. They were able to research information from a range of sources, and most showed confidence at participating in class and group discussions. Pupils worked well together in groups or pairs.
- 82 There were shortcomings in some lessons. In these, pupils failed to concentrate throughout the lesson, had incomplete recall of previous work, or their pace of work was slow so that they made limited progress.

- 83 Pupils have a good awareness of their own strengths and shortcomings. Most understand the assessment process, its grades and levels, and the targets set for them by tutors and subject teachers. Many use this information constructively to further their own learning.
- 84 Pupils make very good progress through the statutory period of schooling and are well prepared for their next stage of education or training.

The development of pupils' personal, social and learning skills

- 85 Pupils have a very positive attitude to their learning. They are well motivated and want to succeed. They respond positively to good teaching, work diligently in lessons, complete tasks and make very effective use of their time.
- 86 Pupils understand and respect the values and expectations promoted by the staff, so that the ethos in the school is calm, harmonious, purposeful and respectful. Behaviour is outstanding. Pupils behave responsibly and show respect for their teachers and peers. They are also courteous and friendly to visitors and willingly offer to direct visitors to classrooms. They show pride in their school and are appreciative of extra-curricular activities.
- 87 There is outstanding progress in personal, social and moral development. Pupils regularly engage in charitable work and raise a great deal of money for a range of good causes. They adopt roles such as school councillors and pupils in Y10 and Y12 are trained to support the reading development of pupils in Y7. Pupils in Y8 act as 'buddies' to support new pupils in the process of transition. There are many opportunities for pupils to develop skills of independent learning. These skills are inconsistently developed in some subjects.
- 88 Pupils show a very good understanding of issues of equal opportunities and are sensitive towards diversity within society. Pupils with disabilities are very well integrated and their needs understood.
- 89 The high levels of attendance, averaging 93.8% in the last school year are outstanding. For the first half-term of the current year the figure is 95%. These high figures are substantially better than those of similar schools (92.2%), and local (91.8%) and national (90.7%) averages.
- 90 In a number of subject areas and in the enrichment programme, pupils display good problem solving skills. They show initiative and independence when they analyse, make decisions and construct well considered solutions to a range of open-ended tasks.
- 91 Pupils are often creative in the development of their ideas and particularly good examples are seen in art, design and technology, drama, English, information technology and music. Here pupils demonstrate high levels of flair, innovation and originality in their work.
- 92 The ability to work with others is outstanding in almost all instances. In pair and group tasks pupils are consistently co-operative, respectful and supportive of each other.

- 93 With very few exceptions, pupils respond positively to feedback on their work. They actively seek to review and evaluate their work in order to improve their own learning and progress.

Post 16

Subject	Post 16
Mathematics	2
Science	2
Computing	1
History	1
Religious education	1
Drama	1

(For an explanation of the grades, please see the beginning of the report)

- 94 When compared with the previous inspection, computing, mathematics and science have maintained their good standards, and drama, history and religious education have improved.
- 95 The standards that pupils achieved, at the different stages, in the six subjects inspected were:

21 lessons	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
Post 16	33%	67%	0%	0%	0%

(For an explanation of the grades, please see the beginning of the report)

- 96 There has been an improvement in standards since the previous inspection when 89% of lessons were grade 2 or better. These standards are also significantly higher than the average reported by HMCI for all those schools in Wales inspected in 2005/2006 (16% grade 1 and 68% grade 2). None of the lessons seen had important shortcomings.

Pupils' success in attaining agreed learning goals

- 97 Post 16, the proportion of students entered for GCE advanced level (A level) examinations who gain A to C grades is above the local but just below the national average. The average points score per student is also above the UA average and equals that for Wales. The pass rate for students gaining A to E grades is above the local and national averages. Almost all students gain their target grades at the end of their period of study.
- 98 Around 80% of students who start courses at post 16 stay to complete them, and just under three-quarters of them then go on to higher education. Of those who do not go to higher education, many move on to apprenticeships.
- 99 Students listen respectfully to their teachers and peers. They confidently put forward points of view and standards of discussion are often outstanding. They justify opinions, counter argue and extend their responses. There is very good use and understanding of subject specific vocabulary and Standard English. Collaboration in lessons to support learning is outstanding.

- 100 Reading skills are also extremely good. Students respond with a very good understanding to a range of challenging texts. There is outstanding progress in the development of critical analysis.
- 101 Students adapt language, style and form to fit the purpose of their writing. Standards are outstanding in relation to abilities. Written work is extended, organised and appropriately expressed. Technical skills are well developed.
- 102 The numerical skills of students have good features and no important shortcomings. They are able to apply these skills in a number of situations in various subject areas across the curriculum.
- 103 Students make regular use of ICT to support their studies in all subjects. They have good access to facilities and use a wide range of applications in their work autonomously. In the subjects inspected, the applications of ICT are good with no important shortcomings in science, history and religious education. Good features outweigh shortcomings in mathematics and drama.

The development of pupils' personal, social and learning skills

- 104 In about a third of the lessons seen, students demonstrated outstanding abilities. Examples of these are:
- high quality personal research;
 - succinct and informative presentations;
 - the analysis of information and the ability to give valid reasons for different perspectives on a range of issues;
 - extracting information from complex text and data;
 - collaborating in the preparation of high quality presentations;
 - the ability to self-diagnose errors and correct them; and
 - commitment and concentration.
- 105 Students are very well motivated and many carry out impressive amounts of research.
- 106 Outstanding progress is made in the development of students' personal, social and learning skills. In lessons, they show positive attitudes to learning and they engage enthusiastically in tasks. Students are courteous and respectful. In relationships with peers and teachers they are very co-operative and friendly. They contribute well to the life of the school by engaging in charitable work and the school's council. They volunteer to represent the school at events and are outstanding ambassadors. Students in Y12 support Y7 pupils in the development of reading skills. They willingly give their time to take part in a range of extra curricular and community activities. They are reliable and behave well with a growing confidence and maturity.
- 107 The overall attendance rate for students is very good, and is consistently over 95%.
- 108 Students collaborate very effectively with each other. They display confident and competent problem solving skills. Outstanding examples are seen in many lessons where ideas, solutions and outcomes are often innovative and creative.

- 109 With very few exceptions, students take appropriate measures to improve their own learning and performance.
- 110 Students are fully aware of equal opportunity issues. They show very good respect for, and understanding of, diversity within the school and within society.
- 111 Students develop very good attitudes to work and gain a good understanding of the wider community and its needs. They acquire the necessary personal skills to contribute well in the workplace and are generally effectively prepared for life after school.

The quality of education and training

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

Grade 1: Good with outstanding features

- 112 The grade awarded by the inspection team is higher than the grade 2 the school awarded itself in its self-evaluation report. This reflects the inspection team's judgement of the impact of teaching on the high standards achieved by pupils and students.

Key stage 3 and Key stage 4

How well teaching and training meets learners' needs and the curricular or course requirements

- 113 The following table shows the quality of teaching and assessment in the lessons observed during the inspection:

123 lessons	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
KS3	15%	79%	6%	0%	0%
KS4	33%	52%	15%	0%	0%
KS3 and KS4	23%	67%	10%	0%	0%

(for an explanation of the grades, please refer to the beginning of the report)

- 114 These figures are an improvement on those achieved in the previous inspection. At that time 78% of teaching was grade 2 or better in key stage 3, and the equivalent for key stage 4 was 75%. The standards are also significantly higher than the average reported by HMCI for all those schools in Wales inspected in 2005/2006 (69% were grade 2 or better). The school has exceeded the target set by the WAG, to be achieved by 2010, for the quality of teaching to be grade 2 or better in 80% of classes.
- 115 Almost a quarter of lessons seen had outstanding features (grade 1). Examples of these were:
- where lessons had a challenging pace that ensured pupils had a continuous focus on the work;
 - where the selection of activities and tasks was very well matched to the context of the work;
 - where high quality planning matched the lesson content to pupils' abilities;
 - the precise and appropriate timing of tasks and activities;
 - the positive and constructive relationships between teachers and pupils which impacted on the quality of pupils' learning;
 - introductions to the lessons that clearly set the scene and expectations for the lesson;
 - the excellent level of feedback to, and support for, individual pupils; and
 - the teachers' high levels of subject knowledge.

- 116 Many of these features were present to a slightly less effective degree in the lessons where there were no important shortcomings (grade 2). In those lessons there was a good pace, lessons were well prepared, activities and practical work were well chosen and individual pupils were well supported. Relationships were good and coursework was well selected and supported.
- 117 In a small number of lessons there were some shortcomings. There were missed opportunities to develop pupils' abilities to work independently. In some lessons the pace slowed towards the second half of the lesson, in others teachers missed opportunities to develop ideas and responses from pupils. In a small number of lessons, pupils were not required to meet the high expectations of behaviour common across the school.
- 118 Almost all lessons started with a clear explanation of the objectives of the lesson, and progress toward these was helpfully reviewed at the end of the lesson. There was good and often outstanding selection of resources for learning, which were central to the success of the lesson.
- 119 Teaching assistants were used well and made good contributions to the progress of many pupils.
- 120 All pupils were treated equally. Teachers, both through example and through their relationships with pupils, actively and successfully promote equality of opportunity.

The rigour of assessment and its use in planning and improving learning

- 121 Procedures and practices for the assessment, recording and reporting of pupils' achievements are good with outstanding features.
- 122 The development of good assessment systems and strategies has been driven by a clear school policy and support from all levels of management. Practice is consistent in all subjects. In lessons, teachers communicate effectively the learning objectives and outcomes to pupils. They also make clear to pupils in key stage 4 the subject requirements for GCSE examinations. All pupils know the focus of their learning and the criteria for success.
- 123 Teachers are rigorous in their approach to the day-to-day marking of pupils' work. They write clear comments which identify what was done well and how improvements may be made. The consistency and quality of these comments is outstanding. There is also good involvement of pupils in self and peer assessment so that they fully understand the criteria, their own strengths and areas where they need to improve.
- 124 The school's database is very comprehensive and well used. Teachers' assessments at the end of key stage 2 and results of standardised tests, reading tests and spelling tests enable the identification of pupils with additional learning needs. Predictions of pupils' end of key stage attainments in all subjects are included on the database. The information is accessible to all staff so they can track pupils' progress. It is also used by teachers to ensure that their teaching is pitched to the level of the teaching group and includes differentiated strategies for individuals.

- 125 The process of monitoring individual pupil progress is well organised and effective. It represents outstanding practice. Subject teachers award levels and grades for attainment and effort three times a year for pupils in Y7 to Y10. The progress of pupils in Y11 is monitored twice during the year since these pupils are involved in final GCSE examinations. There are useful descriptors of effort grades which are commonly accepted and ensure consistency and fairness.
- 126 Group tutors use the class data to monitor pupils' current attainment in all subjects and compare them with those predicted. In key stage 3, they discuss progress with all pupils on a one-to-one basis in personal and social education lessons. In key stage 4, there is a weekly designated lesson for tutors to monitor progress. Support and guidance by tutors encourages pupils to set their own targets for improvement.
- 127 Each student development manager has the data for the whole year group. Support is provided for pupils who are under-performing. This includes, where appropriate, discussions with parents, pupils and subject teachers. Targets for improvement are set when necessary and senior managers check that appropriate action is taken.
- 128 Any pupil who is underachieving in lessons is referred to the relevant development manager for mentoring and support. There is a review of progress against targets set. The data is also used by subject teachers and learning managers to set targets for improvement in subjects.
- 129 Learning managers ensure that assessments are accurate and fair. Every five weeks the specific focus of every departmental meeting is a rigorous scrutiny of books. Minutes of these meetings are recorded so that the senior managers can monitor practice. In addition, subject leaders organise departmental moderation and standardisation.
- 130 Planning of assessment and reporting events is outstanding. An annual parents'/carers' evening is arranged for each year group following a termly monitoring of progress. This ensures that parents/carers receive current information on progress in relation to predicted targets. When appropriate, half levels are added to levels for pupils in key stage 3 so that parents/carers can identify progress more readily. Parents/carers learn of their children's attainment in each subject and targets are set for improvement. There is evidence of the appreciation of the quality of information shared by the high level of attendance of parents/carers at these review meetings.
- 131 Annual reports are very informative and include subject specific comments on progress as well as targets for improvement. There is outstanding consistency in the quality of subject comments. Form tutors summarise achievements as well as efforts and comment on pupils' personal, social and learning skills as well as contributions made to the life of the school. In addition, the student development managers comment on all aspects of progress. The quality and frequency of information on progress shared with parents is outstanding.
- 132 Subject leaders ensure that the requirements of examination boards, the National Curriculum and Code of Practice are met.

Post 16

How well teaching and training meets learners' needs and the curricular or course requirements

133 The following table shows the quality of teaching and assessment in the lessons observed during the inspection:

40 lessons	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5
Post 16	35%	60%	5%	0%	0%

(for an explanation of the grades, please refer to the beginning of the report)

134 These figures are an improvement on those achieved in the previous inspection, when 89% of lessons were awarded grade 2 or better.

135 Over a third of the lessons seen had outstanding features. Examples of these were:

- a challenging pace to the lessons;
- high quality and productive relationships;
- highly effective one-to-one teaching;
- the planning of high quality activities;
- the use of well selected exemplar material, chosen to develop students' thinking and evaluative skills;
- very helpful feedback to the students on their strengths and shortcomings, and reference to assessment objectives; and
- the teacher's excellent subject knowledge.

136 Most of these qualities were present, but to a lesser degree, in the 60% of lessons awarded a grade 2. Many lessons also encouraged students to develop their thinking skills, and some, but not all, encouraged them to become independent learners. Many teachers used the whiteboard projectors effectively. These lessons had no important shortcomings.

137 In the small number of lessons where there were some shortcomings, teaching was occasionally over-prescriptive or lacked sufficient pace.

The rigour of assessment and its use in planning and improving learning

138 Post 16, the assessment, recording and reporting of students' work is good with outstanding features. In day-to-day marking of students' work there is outstanding consistency of good practice. Subject teachers clearly identify strengths and indicate how improvements may be made. Marking is regular, rigorous and accurate in all subjects. Students are made fully aware of the lesson objectives, criteria for success and the requirements of the examination boards in all subjects. Subject teams scrutinise marked work regularly and frequently to monitor the quality and accuracy of marking and to share good practice. Assessments are also standardised and moderated.

139 The school's database includes predicted grades for all students studying subjects at A level. Students are aware of these predictions which are accessible to all the staff. The monitoring of progress by subject teachers is continuous. They are aware of

predicted grades and they identify those who underachieve as they assess day-to-day work. They set targets for improvement and refer individuals to group tutors and student development managers who mentor and monitor progress.

- 140 Subject teachers update the database each term for students in Y12 and twice a year for those in Y13. Students' current attainment is then compared with predicted grades by group tutors. Progress is discussed with all students who then set their own targets for improvement in weekly lessons with tutors designated for monitoring progress. The student development manager, the head of the sixth form and senior managers also mentor students. The monitoring of progress represents outstanding practice.
- 141 A meeting between staff and parents/carers follows a progress review and current progress is shared. A full report follows a second review. The reports are informative and comprehensive. They include subject specific comments for each subject and comprehensive summary comments on personal, social and learning skills written by group tutors. The student development manager also comments on progress and effort. The quality of information to parents is outstanding.

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

Grade 1: Good with outstanding features

- 142 The grade awarded by the inspection team matches the grade in the school's self-evaluation report.

The extent to which learning experiences meet learners' needs and interests

- 143 Overall, the curriculum meets learners' needs, and gives them the opportunity to achieve accreditation through a number of learning pathways.
- 144 There is good access to the curriculum for all pupils and students. Broadly, the curriculum offers balance, breadth and progression in most areas of study.
- 145 In key stage 3, most subjects are given sufficient time to cover the programme of study. Able linguists can study both French and German in Y9, but are not given additional time to do so.
- 146 In key stage 4, the provision includes a number of new GCSE courses and a vocational course in leisure and tourism. There is good provision for a small number of pupils who have difficulty engaging fully in the mainstream curriculum, through the Curriculum Enhancement Programme provided at other establishments and the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (ASDAN) taught at school.
- 147 The curricular programme post 16 offers a good range of advanced supplementary (AS) and A level courses with some subjects being repeated in the timetable structure to accommodate the large number of students choosing this learning pathway. Well-established links with a number of colleges ensures that close to 90% of Y11 pupils continue their education post 16.

- 148 The school has made progress in addressing the needs of pupils and students in the 14 to 19 curriculum. However, some learning pathways have not yet been fully considered or developed by the school.
- 149 The personal, social and health education programme is well planned and delivered through the enrichment programme. Visitors/specialists are used effectively to supplement the programme.
- 150 The school has been successful in gaining the Basic Skills Quality award. All the key skills are promoted in schemes of work and the school plans for all students in Y12 to be entered for accreditation in 2008. The recently appointed key skills co-ordinator is currently developing further strategies to raise the standards achieved in the key skills and wider key skills, with the possibility of Welsh Baccalaureate accreditation in the future.
- 151 Whilst there is a school policy for numeracy across the curriculum, it does not address the application of a common terminology in all subjects.
- 152 Learning and social experiences for all are significantly enriched by an outstanding programme of extra-curricular activities. The outstanding features include the:
- extensive range of activities in the Summer Festival;
 - out-of-school hours learning opportunities on Tuesday and Thursday, attended by up to 400 pupils and students;
 - very popular Duke of Edinburgh award initiative;
 - Welsh Heritage Schools Initiative Award scheme which has provided many pupils with very good opportunities to form strong links with the local community;
 - wide range of sporting activities, and many opportunities in music through peripatetic lessons, joining choirs, bands and the orchestra; and
 - many visits to theatres, galleries, museums and field trips in many subjects.
- 153 Learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good with outstanding features. The school is a civilised, caring society in which outstanding emphasis is placed on good behaviour and respect towards individuals and the environment.
- 154 Pupils and students develop a good insight into values and beliefs through good opportunities to discuss and reflect on issues raised in assemblies and lessons. They successfully reflect on their own experiences, develop their own opinions and learn to respect the beliefs of others.
- 155 Learners develop an outstanding understanding of moral issues because teachers regularly raise them and encourage pupils to discuss openly issues such as self-discipline and honesty. This is reflected in respect for each other, their teachers and other adults. They show considerable concern and sense of responsibility for others through their support for a wide variety of local, national and international charities.
- 156 Pupils and students have an outstanding awareness of their social responsibilities. The school and year councils provide outstanding opportunities for pupils and students to exercise responsibility. In most subjects, pupils work together effectively in pairs and groups, learning to collaborate with each other, and to share ideas and information.

- 157 Learners acquire an outstanding awareness of other cultures through participation in a variety of activities, including musical and drama events, and in lessons. They have a good understanding of their responsibility of living in a multi-cultural society. The Welsh department works hard and successfully to foster a Welsh environment with good support in a number of subject areas.
- 158 The partnerships with parents, community and primary schools are good with some outstanding features. Those with further and higher education providers and initial teacher training institutes are good with no important shortcomings.
- 159 There are good communications with parents and primary schools. All the expected information literature, meetings to review performance, pastoral and curricular links are established and are of good quality. The community benefits from the school as an adult teaching centre and from students' charity and other community support activities. Sections of the community support learning in several areas. Aspects of these partnerships that are outstanding are the:
- year specific information for parents contained in mini-prospectuses, Y7 curriculum guidance and key stage 4 work-experience guidance;
 - Living History Transitional Project in the key stage 2 to 3 bridging activities that integrates local community groups as well as students across all key stages into a much enjoyed local pageant; and
 - Community Focused Schools programme which involves interaction with numerous elements in the community.
- 160 The links with other education providers are well established and ensure that students are adequately informed about education pathways appropriate for purpose and what they need to do to pursue them. The links with several colleges ensure that the school has trainee teachers who bring new approaches and fresh perspectives to a wide range of subjects.
- 161 The curriculum meets legal requirements. The school provides a daily act of collective worship for all pupils and the programmes for personal, social and health education, work-related education and careers education and guidance meet the WAG guidelines.

The extent to which the learning experiences respond to the needs of employers and the wider community

- 162 Work-related education is good with no important shortcomings.
- 163 The world of work is studied well in lessons from Y7 onwards. It begins with an exploration of personal skills and job requirements and leads on to a good understanding of GCSE option choices in Y9, in relation to future careers. All learners in Y10 and Y12 benefit from a well-organised work experience, with Careers Wales overseeing good training prior to placement and good debriefing afterwards. A team of school staff usefully monitors all placements during work experience.

- 164 The provision for the development of pupils' bilingual skills is outstanding. Sufficient time is allocated to the full GCSE Welsh course at key stage 4 and a number of pupils follow the full course in the time allocated to the short course with additional classes after school. A good number of students follow the AS and A level courses and go on to study Welsh at university. With the support of the area's Urdd Development Officer, the Welsh department organises an outstanding range of extra-curricular activities involving Welsh language and culture to pupils at each key stage. Further support is provided by post-16 students at the school who work as Urdd Millennium volunteers, which requires their involvement in promoting the Welsh language in their community. The school has enjoyed success in the Urdd eisteddfod at national level and pupils contribute interesting activities for Welsh learners in the Urdd magazine. The initiative "Iaith Pawb yng Nghastell Alun" has significantly increased the use of Welsh in other areas of the curriculum and around the school.
- 165 A recent audit identified that Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig is effectively embedded into schemes of work in all subjects across the curriculum.
- 166 The school has made good progress in beginning to raise the awareness of sustainable development and global citizenship. It is well covered in schemes of work in geography, personal, social and health education, science and technology. Further input has been given in assemblies and by guest speakers to various groups of learners.
- 167 There is good understanding of employers' needs. Governors and links in the community ensure a current knowledge of local requirements and a strong supportive partnership with Careers Wales reinforces this and provides reliable information on national and international needs.
- 168 Entrepreneurial and other workplace skills are generally well developed. The very extensive charity activities that each year group engages in foster good levels of teamwork, innovative thinking and problem solving. The complexity of these enterprises increases as students move up the school, with post 16 students regularly staging events that require good co-ordination of a wide range of skills. There are good opportunities for students to meet entrepreneurs and hear their experiences directly.
- 169 Overall, the school has made good progress in addressing many national priorities. There are many strengths in the standards achieved at all key stages, the development of bilingualism and the quality of the transition programme. Good progress has been made in launching the key skills initiatives and promoting opportunities for learners to take responsibility for their own learning. Consideration has been given to 14 to 19 learning pathways, although the school has not yet fully investigated the potential of all initiatives.

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

Grade 1: Good with outstanding features

170 The grade awarded by the inspection team matches the grade in the school's self-evaluation report.

The quality of pupils' care, support and guidance

171 Staff are committed to providing the highest standard of care for all the learners. They co-operate very effectively with external agencies. As a result the quality of care provided, support and assistance to pupils and students is an outstanding feature and one of the school's special characteristics.

172 There is an outstanding relationship between the school and the parents and the community. The school co-operates closely with its feeder primary schools in curricular, social and extra-curricular activities.

173 The school conforms with the registration and reporting on attendance requirements. Attendance is thoroughly monitored with the assistance of the administrative officer, who provides regular analyses to the senior management team.

174 The parents receive regular information about the life and work of the school. They are welcomed to school to discuss any concerns and are regularly consulted by means of questionnaires to discover their views about different aspects of school life. The vast majority say that they are happy with the information that they receive and the care offered to their children.

175 Pupils and parents confirm that the induction programme for new pupils is outstanding. The extra support given to new pupils by post 16 students and Y8 pupils during the induction period also helps to ensure that new pupils settle down quickly.

176 The School Council actively contributes in a positive manner to the life of the school.

177 The monitoring of learners' progress across all subjects has outstanding features. Group tutors make effective use of the school's system of merits in key stage 3 to encourage pupils to succeed. Student development managers regularly review learners' behaviour, effort and achievement in subjects. They keep very good records and track learners' progress carefully and closely so that underachievement is spotted quickly.

178 When pupils or students give cause for concern, parents/carers are contacted and targets are set to help pupils to improve. The very good liaison between subject leaders and student development managers helps to identify learners who underachieve or misbehave. This often results in a pupil receiving special mentoring in order to make the necessary adjustments to the learners' academic progress or behaviour.

- 179 Effective teaching and the school's detailed procedures encourage good behaviour, and expectations are consistent from one lesson to the next. Effective use is made of positive rewards, with clear consequences for poor behaviour. Good use is made of 'Internal Isolation' when pupils are given individual work under the supervision of a senior member of staff before they return to their usual classes.
- 180 Pupils and students make effective use of the readily accessible resource for careers education. Careers education is taught as part of the personal, social and health education. Lessons are well planned and enable learners to develop relevant skills.
- 181 Standards in relation to healthy eating and lifestyles are good. Learners show knowledge and understanding of the importance of diet and exercise. The school's efforts were recognised recently when it gained Part Two of the Healthy Schools Award.
- 182 Procedures for child protection are appropriate. A senior teacher co-ordinates effectively with outside agencies. Detailed guidance on policy exists for staff and the process follows the guidelines of the UA.
- 183 A designated teacher takes overall responsibility for health and safety issues being properly reported and acted upon. Risk assessments are effectively undertaken where required. No health and safety issues were noted during the inspection.
- 184 The co-operation of all staff, the quick reaction to any problems and the confidence the learners have in the staff are outstanding features.

The quality of the provision for special educational needs

- 185 Using information provided by primary schools, the school identifies accurately pupils who need extra support. An effective process of identifying relevant pupils continues through close links between subject leaders, the student development managers and the special educational needs co-ordinator.
- 186 The school's response to the requirements of the Code of Practice is good. Statements of special educational needs are reviewed effectively. Parents and external agencies take a meaningful and practical role in the process.
- 187 Good individual education and behaviour plans are prepared. They reflect well to the needs of the pupils who often achieve their targets successfully. There is also evidence that the plans are well used by subject teachers when preparing their lessons.
- 188 Pupils with additional learning needs make good educational progress which corresponds to their needs and ability. All gain some GCSE accreditation and they mature into confident learners.
- 189 The paired reading scheme has outstanding success in improving the reading skills of Y 7 pupils. Progress in reading is rapid. Parents are given the opportunity to implement the scheme at home and to share in their children's success. The school librarian provides good support for the scheme.

- 190 The use of commercial computer programmes and the withdrawal of pupils in small groups from lessons, also make a valuable contribution in developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills.
- 191 Teaching assistants give effective support for individuals and small groups of pupils in mainstream classes. They provide continuity and security for less confident pupils. Their work is regularly monitored by the inclusion co-ordinator, who provides guidance and expertise when required.
- 192 The Additional Learning Needs Centre is well organised and is an effective focus for the work and is a source of expertise for pupils, students and staff.
- 193 The school achieves an outstanding level of success in enabling pupils with emotional problems or challenging behaviour to come to better terms with their difficulty. When pupils exhibit challenging behaviour, staff reaction is informed by their detailed knowledge of the pupils and the clear guidance provided by the school. The UA Behaviour Team works closely with the school and parents to set realistic and agreed targets. Consequently the school's temporary exclusion rates are very low and there have been no permanent exclusions over the last twelve months.
- 194 The special educational needs co-ordinator and the inclusion co-ordinator provide good guidance and support. The school as a whole is very supportive towards learners with additional learning needs and offers them a happy and caring environment within which they can learn and progress.

The quality of the provision for equal opportunities

- 195 The quality of the provision for equal opportunities is outstanding.
- 196 All members of staff show outstanding care and concern for pupils and students. Relationships between adults and learners are a very strong feature of the school's ethos.
- 197 The curriculum successfully provides specific opportunities for learners to learn about, and discuss, issues related to racism and human rights. The few pupils and students from ethnic minority groups are well integrated and have good friends throughout the age range.
- 198 The school monitors and compares the results of boys and girls. Every subject option is available to both boys and girls at key stage 4, and the school tries to challenge stereotyping in advising pupils on subject choices.
- 199 Careful planning successfully ensures that no pupil suffers from less favourable treatment than others.
- 200 All learners are given effective and sensitive support if problems arise in school, home or the local community. The school has an outstanding working relationship with a wide range of external agencies. The few pupils in the care of the Local Authority have good individual pastoral plans that provide them with the necessary support and guidance.

- 201 The school is successful in creating a climate where any discrimination or unpleasant attitude of any sort will not be tolerated. It ensures fair play for all its pupils and students. Students, pupils and parents are confident that the school would respond without delay to any instance of discrimination or unfair treatment.
- 202 The school has outstanding procedures which ensure that any pupil who has concerns about bullying is given opportunities to convey concerns safely. The school deals with any hint of bullying promptly. Pupils indicated that bullying is a rarity.
- 203 The few pupils with restricted mobility can gain access to all parts of the school. The school makes the utmost effort to ensure suitable arrangements for each learner's particular needs.

Leadership and management

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

Grade 1: Good with outstanding features

204 The grade awarded by the inspection team matches the grade in the school's self-evaluation report.

How well leaders and managers provide clear direction and promote high standards

205 In its mission statement the school commits itself to providing high quality learning experiences and expectations, continuous improvement and opportunities to experience, recognise and celebrate success for all. It is very successful in meeting these commitments.

206 The headteacher and his senior colleagues provide the school with outstanding leadership. They have high expectations of their own performance and that of teachers, pupils and students. The core values of the school are widely shared and consistently applied at all levels.

207 A key feature of management philosophy is a drive for continuous improvement, which is clearly successful. The school has recently increased consultation with staff, both through the formal meeting structures or through frequent personal contacts. A strong feature is the consistency with which school policies are successfully implemented by all teachers, which is an indicator of the success of management at all levels. The main values and purposes of the school are widely shared and applied.

208 A published schedule of regular meetings ensures good communication. Senior managers meet individual learning managers weekly, using an agreed common agenda, and subject areas meet regularly. These meetings focus on teaching and learning and all contribute to the school's quality assurance procedures. Additionally, senior management encourages productive discussions and consultation between individuals.

209 There is good, and frequently outstanding leadership at all levels of management. All staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and of the standards they are expected to work to. There is rigorous attention to detail which is an important factor in ensuring that expectations are met.

210 The school successfully promotes equal opportunities both for staff and for pupils. Whilst there are some fluctuating differences in examination results obtained by boys and girls, the school rapidly identifies these and seeks to take measures to remedy them.

211 All the required policies are in place and have been approved by the governors.

- 212 The school actively pursues national priorities as demonstrated by their work in promoting bilingualism, sustainability and healthy lifestyles. Their development of 14 to 19 Pathways is less well advanced at this stage.
- 213 There is outstanding work with local primary schools both on curriculum and assessment standardisation and continuity. There are some links with a local further education college; a small number of pupils/students have courses either at a local college or one taught by college lecturers at the school.
- 214 Annual targets are agreed with the UA, and the school uses a range of standardised test and predictive data to help in this process. Over recent years, results in National Curriculum assessments and public examinations have been close to the agreed targets, which are sufficiently challenging. Target setting is undertaken as an integral part of the school's constant pursuit of improvement.
- 215 As has been reported earlier in this report (Key Question 2), the school has excellent procedures for tracking and evaluating the performance of pupils and students. It uses this data to equally effectively monitor its overall progress in delivering improvement, and the progress of individual subject areas. There are very effective systems in the school to monitor and evaluate the performance of individual teachers.
- 216 The school actively seeks to improve the quality of its teachers through internal and external training courses. An important feature of the internal work is the sharing of good practice within the school. A very successful development is the work of the Leadership and Management Group. Members of this group, (comprising some 27 volunteers), are developing their management and leadership skills with the school's support by undertaking research and project work in the school, often with support funding from the General Teaching Council for Wales. This project won a Welsh Secondary Schools Association Award in 2006.

How well governors meet their responsibilities

- 217 The governors have a thorough knowledge of the school and a strong understanding of their roles in its management. There are appropriate committees to review different aspects of school. They have a good awareness of the community that the school serves and contribute positively to strategic planning.
- 218 Detailed reports from the headteacher and, where necessary, from other managers ensure that governors are well informed. Information is constructively integrated into a good understanding of regional and national trends in education, and with the needs of their community. Governors are properly involved in self-evaluation but direct monitoring of the effects of their decisions on school processes, through link governors, is currently underdeveloped.
- 219 The governing body provides a strong sense of identity and direction for the school. They carry out their statutory duties well. School provision and requirements are clearly set out in the prospectus and progress is reviewed well in the annual report to parents.

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

Grade 1: Good with outstanding features
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220 In its self evaluation, the school awarded itself a grade 2 for this question. The inspection team judged that the impact of evaluation and planning in the school are a significant factor in the high standards achieved.

How effectively the school's performance is monitored and evaluated

221 Managers at all levels have a clear understanding of the strengths and shortcomings of the areas of the school for which they have responsibility. This knowledge is gained through a formal quality assurance process and well developed and encouraged informal and constant discussions and consultation.

222 Performance Management is used effectively and the school successfully seeks to gain maximum benefit from the process by linking the pupil progress objectives agreed with individual teachers to their subject development plan.

223 The leadership team is currently half-way through the first cycle of a newly introduced biennial review of Learning Areas. Last year all three core subjects were reviewed. Each review moves appropriately through a preparation phase, a week where all members of the school's leadership team and the learning manager observe lessons, and a reporting phase. This results in very helpful insights and in-depth reviews of the quality of education provided although some of the comments in the subject's self-review documents are overly descriptive. The whole process then links effectively to planning for improvement at subject and school level.

224 At least twice a term, each subject area conducts a team review of a sample of pupils' books to evaluate their quality. In the following week the leadership team repeats a similar exercise. This regular scrutiny is another important contribution in maintaining awareness and establishing the consistently high quality of marking, assessment and learning.

225 The headteacher and his two deputies are linked to specific learning areas; they meet individual learning managers regularly. These meetings follow a common agenda so the school can readily collate the information gathered, thereby developing an informed overview of the school. The leadership team also meets learning managers each term to assess progress against the subject area's current development plan.

226 Subject leaders and learning managers analyse results of external examinations with members of the senior management team. There is very good understanding of comparative data and review of trends in progress. Challenging yet realistic targets for improvement are agreed. Subject leaders and learning managers also present an annual review of subject progress to the governing body.

227 The overall effectiveness of formal monitoring and self-evaluation is underpinned by the daily work of middle managers who have a responsibility for evaluation and improvement in their areas of the school. This aspect of quality assurance is more

informal and based on meetings, individual discussions, consultations and an 'open door' attitude to classrooms. These responsibilities are carried out both conscientiously and very effectively and have a significant impact both on maintaining and raising standards.

- 228 The views of staff are strongly represented through formal and informal meetings and consultation, and through the work of the Leadership and Management Group. The school has conducted surveys of pupils' attitudes, the outcomes of which feed into the consultation processes in the school. There is also an active School Council.
- 229 At each of their meetings, parents are invited to complete questionnaires, the analysis of which helps the school to consider adjusting its procedures.

The effectiveness of planning for improvement

- 230 The outcomes of all the quality assurance and self-evaluation procedures are effectively used to inform planning for improvement. The School Development Plan (SDP) is a comprehensive document that clearly identifies the whole school priorities for the coming year. It also contains the development plans from each subject area and from other areas with a whole-school impact such as careers education, 14 to 19 developments and the academic database. Each of these section reports addresses the school's priorities and identifies its individual contribution. Each section plans is written to a clear common format that gives details of targets, responsibilities, additional resources and success criteria.
- 231 The combination of self-evaluation and planning has had a clear impact on the continuous improvement evident in the school.
- 232 Since the previous inspection, all the subjects then identified as being 'satisfactory' have improved to the extent that those inspected this year are now at least good. Standards in ICT have also improved significantly. There is now good access to computers and most subjects use ICT regularly, and each classroom is equipped with a whiteboard projector linked to a computer. These are well used in teaching. Very good progress has been made in developing the school's policy and practice in target setting, together with very good consistency across the school in its execution. Pupils and students now agree targets for improvement with their tutors, and they have targets for improvement in their subject areas. This information is shared with parents through the annual full report on each pupil's progress.

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

Grade 1: Good with outstanding features

- 233 The grade awarded by the inspection team matches the grade in the school's self-evaluation report.

The adequacy, suitability and use made of staffing, learning resources and accommodation.

- 234 The school has gained the Investor in People Award.

- 235 Overall, the staffing of the school is good with outstanding features. The number of staff is sufficient for the school to run effectively and efficiently. The experience profile shows that there is a good balance between experienced teachers and those new to the profession, including five newly qualified teachers.
- 236 Teaching staff are appropriately well qualified and trained. Their knowledge and expertise meets the needs of all aspects of learning areas, and the wider curriculum. These are outstanding features.
- 237 There is a small number of staff who teach outside their specialist subject. However, due to the level of support that they receive, there is no adverse effect on pupils' standards of achievement.
- 238 The nine teaching assistants provide very good help and encouragement to those pupils with learning and behavioural problems. They work very effectively with all subject teachers and the assistant headteacher responsible for additional special needs.
- 239 The school employs three cover supervisors to look after classes for absent staff, otherwise they are deployed in administrative, pastoral and assessment support roles. This represents good practice.
- 240 The bursar and administrative staff ensure that the office, reception, reprographic area and the open learning centre run efficiently.
- 241 The site supervisor and the assistant caretaker are responsible for the day to day maintenance of the site, and contribute very effectively to the daily routines of the school.
- 242 Technician support in science, information technology, and design and technology is very good overall.
- 243 The quality and quantity of learning resources for key stages 3 and 4 are good with outstanding features.
- 244 The initial allocation of capitation (funding) to subject areas is based on an agreed formula. In addition, any agreed initiatives are supported from a supplementary fund. The implementation of this procedure has produced an impressive level of resources in both quality and quantity. This is an outstanding feature.
- 245 There is a very good supply of a wide range of text books and equipment. The school produces a creative range of subject materials in-house.
- 246 Provision of ICT equipment for the teaching of discrete IT lessons and for use by all subjects across the curriculum is a good feature. There are four main IT rooms with other networked computer suites in design technology, media studies and music. The open learning centre has a further 14 computers used for independent research and to improve the presentation of work.
- 247 Almost all classrooms are equipped with a networked computer and a data projector. These are often used effectively to enhance both teaching and learning.

- 248 There is a small number of interactive white boards that are also used to enhance teaching in a number of subjects. Overall, they are used very effectively to enhance the quality of teaching in lessons.
- 249 The use of resources out of school to enrich the curriculum is outstanding. These include many quality visits to museums, art galleries, theatres and abroad. An extremely wide range of visiting speakers enhances pupils' learning experiences.
- 250 The open learning centre (library) is relatively small for a school of this size. It is a very active area and is effectively and efficiently run by the centre assistants. The quality and variety of the book stock of fiction and reference books is mainly very good.
- 251 At break-times and lunch-times the learning centre is well used by pupils and students for independent learning and research. Subject areas make good, effective use of the centre during lessons and project boxes are made available. Twice weekly, it is open after school for the study club.
- 252 For post 16 students, there is a good range and supply of textbooks and equipment. Students can use the facilities in the learning centre for independent learning, research and to complete assignments. They also have full use of a large study which also has a suite of 14 computers.
- 253 Accommodation, which is close to capacity, is sufficient for the numbers of pupils currently on roll. It meets the pastoral and academic needs of the curriculum.
- 254 The school has an overall clean, fresh appearance. There are colourful and attractive displays in classrooms and corridors which provide an attractive and at times stimulating learning environment. These are good features.
- 255 Most rooms are well maintained and decorated. Many rooms are large enough to cater well for most class sizes but others are too small to accommodate some classes comfortably and restrict teaching styles.
- 256 The room used for drama is too small for some classes and does not have any facilities for lighting and sound. These shortcomings occasionally restrict the range of learning experiences available.
- 257 Accommodation for post 16 students is sufficient for both the academic and pastoral needs of the curriculum. Students make good use of their large, well equipped common room.
- 258 The school grounds and buildings are kept clean and litter free.

How effectively and efficiently resources are managed to provide value for money

- 259 The deployment and management of staff are very good and make efficient and effective use of their time, expertise and experience.
- 260 The continuous professional development of teaching staff is an outstanding feature. It is linked effectively to the school's Performance Management policy, and the SDP

together with the needs of learning areas and individuals. It is very well co-ordinated and courses attended by staff are carefully evaluated and used to the school's benefit.

- 261 Within the school, the leadership and management group play an important part in highlighting a systematic approach to the sharing of good practice across the staff. (see paragraph 216). The school has run a successful leadership course for junior and middle managers. A high quality training programme that includes support for newly qualified teachers, for extended professional development of recently qualified teachers, for initial teacher training students and for teachers new to the school is very thorough and comprehensive.
- 262 The school has implemented its strategy for the workload agreement, making proper provision in the time-table for teachers' planning, preparation and assessment.
- 263 The headteacher, after consulting all interested bodies, has implemented successfully the school's structure for the new teaching and learning responsibilities.
- 264 The financial management of the school is exemplary. The headteacher, the bursar and the governing body's committee for finance effectively and efficiently manage the available budget. The school conscientiously pursues all grants and sponsorship that are available.
- 265 The finance committee meets regularly and receives detailed up-to-date reports from the headteacher. Financial decisions are well focused both on the curriculum needs and the needs of the Whole School Priority 2007-2008 document.
- 266 The bursar is responsible for the competent day-to-day running of the school's finances. The headteacher and learning area managers are provided with immediate breakdowns and current balances. School spending is closely and carefully monitored.
- 267 The recommendations of the last auditors' report have been addressed.
- 268 The school reviews and uses its resources and finances very prudently, effectively and competently.
- 269 The high level of pupils' and students' achievements, the exceptional quality of teaching, and the quality of management at all levels ensure that the school provides very good value for money.

Standards achieved in subjects and areas of learning

Mathematics

Key stage 3:	Grade 2	Good features and no important shortcomings
Key stage 4:	Grade 2	Good features and no important shortcomings
Post 16:	Grade 2	Good features and no important shortcomings

270 Examination results in this subject at GCSE over the last five years have consistently improved and are well above both national and local pass rates at grades A* to C and A* and A. These results are higher than would be expected for pupils of similar ability.

271 Over the last three years there have been relatively small entries for A level. However, in both of the last two years, the pass rate at A to C grades has been 100%. These results are in line with students' efforts and abilities.

Good features

Key stages 3 and 4

272 Most pupils across the age range answer questions orally with clarity, understanding and accuracy.

273 They are developing a sound knowledge of number, vulgar fractions, decimal fractions and percentages and the relationship between them.

274 They have spatial awareness and understand the concepts of area and volume using appropriate units.

275 Most pupils with additional learning needs make good progress.

276 Most pupils of all ability use calculators effectively in their work.

Key stage 3

277 The mental mathematical abilities of less able pupils are improved by their participation in regular starter activities in lessons.

278 Pupils in Y7 can draw basic regular three dimensional objects and can recognise the properties of cylinders, spheres, prisms etc.

279 Y8 pupils are learning to apply investigational techniques to mathematical problems.

280 Most Y9 pupils have a good knowledge of co-ordinates and axes. They are learning to interpret the equation of a straight line.

Key stage 4

281 Y11 pupils benefit from high levels of support and mentoring to help them reach their potential.

282 The more able pupils in year 10 can use Pythagoras' Theorem to answer problems from everyday life situations.

283 Pupils in Y11 successfully apply their mathematical knowledge to past examination questions. With the more able, the emphasis is on algebraic techniques and, with the middle ability, on correlation in data handling.

Post 16

284 Y13 students have a very good understanding of a range of concepts in pure mathematics and decision mathematics. They are learning to adapt this knowledge to solve associated questions.

285 Y12 students are making very good progress in understanding the basic concepts of pure mathematics.

286 Students with difficulties, especially in Y12, benefit from the readily available support at all times.

Shortcomings

Key stages 3 and 4

287 A small number of pupils of all abilities use calculators inappropriately for trivial calculations.

Post 16

288 No significant shortcomings.

Science

Key stage 3:	Grade 2	Good features and no important shortcomings
Key stage 4:	Grade 2	Good features and no important shortcomings
Post 16:	Grade 2	Good features and no important shortcomings

289 The percentage of pupils in 2005 and 2006 who have gained GCSE grades A* to C is higher than the figures for the UA and for Wales. Particularly high percentages of pupils have gained grades A* and A.

290 During the same two years, the percentages of students gaining grades A to C in AS and A level components of biology, chemistry and physics have been above the figures for the UA and Wales.

Good features

Key stage 3

291 Many pupils across the full ability range possess sound knowledge and understanding of a wide range of topics.

292 Many pupils recall and use concepts well to solve a range of scientific problems in familiar and unfamiliar situations.

- 293 The majority of pupils possess good understanding of some of the scientific principles in areas such as the transfer of energy, healthy living and how human activity affects our environment.
- 294 Overall, the majority of pupils use scientific terms accurately in many problem solving activities and responses to questions.
- 295 Pupils with additional and special learning needs make good progress relative to their ability.
- 296 On the whole, pupils develop good practical skills, recording and analysing results appropriately. Pupils work safely and collaborate well.
- 297 The majority of pupils draw accurate graphs and demonstrate good numerical skills when analysing results and solving problems.
- 298 Many pupils use ICT skills well when carrying out research.

Key stage 4

- 299 More able pupils have a very sound understanding of the more complex principles developed in the key stage.
- 300 Many pupils have a good recall of previous work and can apply their knowledge to a range of tasks and applications of science.
- 301 Many pupils develop a good understanding of the contribution that science makes to the development of industry and its impact on the environment and the economy.
- 302 The majority of pupils undertake practical work confidently, work systematically and record measurements with precision.
- 303 The majority of pupils have completed some Investigative Skills Assignments to a good standard.
- 304 Pupils with additional or special educational needs make good progress in the course that they are following.

Post 16

- 305 The majority of students in biology, chemistry and physics make at least good progress in the respective programmes of study.
- 306 Generally, students have a good recall and understanding of key concepts and principles.
- 307 The majority of students are able to apply their theoretical understanding to a number of problems involving the analysis of data and problem solving to confirm their knowledge of the topic.
- 308 The majority of students are developing good practical skills. They are able to analyse and evaluate their observations and link their findings to their predictions and scientific knowledge and understanding in most situations.

309 In some classes, students are able to work independently and collect information and data to explain patterns of scientific behaviour.

Shortcomings

Key stage 3

310 A minority of average and lower ability pupils have a less secure recall and understanding of current and previous work.

311 Some pupils have difficulty in applying scientific principles to some tasks and applications in both familiar and unfamiliar situations and to offer explanations of behaviour they observe.

Key stage 4

312 A minority of average and lower ability pupils have not mastered some concepts thoroughly enough. They have some difficulty applying their understanding in some scientific problems.

313 A minority of pupils gain low marks in the Investigative Skills Assignments.

Post 16

314 A minority of students are less secure in their recall of previous work.

315 Some have difficulty applying scientific principles in problems and practical applications.

Information technology

Key stage 3: Grade 2 Good features and no important shortcomings

Key stage 4: Grade 2 Good features and no important shortcomings

Post 16: Grade 1 Good with outstanding features

316 GCSE examination results in 2006 at grades A* to C and A* to G were above national averages. Provisional results for 2007 were well above national averages for A* to C and A* to G grades. In both years grades were broadly in line with pupils' ability.

317 Results in A level Computing in 2006 were above national averages for grades A to C. The provisional results for 2007 for A to C were well above national averages and expectations.

Good features

Key stage 3

318 At key stage 3 pupils make good progress in their development of IT competencies. Pupils are very confident in their management of computers and use of the Internet.

319 Standards of communicating information are often outstanding. Pupils design well and use a wide variety of communicating information packages to combine text and

images according to their designs. They confidently import information and graphics from the Internet or other sources to meet their design requirements.

- 320 Pupils are able to set up databases, understand terminology and carry out basic interrogations.
- 321 Pupils are able to set up spreadsheets, understand their functions and conduct basic calculations.
- 322 More able pupils are extended and lower ability pupils and those with additional learning needs make good progress.

Key stage 4

- 323 Pupils develop a comprehensive range of IT skills in the portfolio components of the GCSE examination course which underpins their project development in Y11. They confidently communicate, handle and model information for a variety of purposes and audiences.
- 324 Project work is often well developed. Research, analysis and problem solving skills are good and sometimes outstanding. This is particularly so with projects which are based on real life contexts.
- 325 Pupils present their work well and are able to explain clearly why they have chosen specific IT applications.
- 326 Theoretical understanding is good.
- 327 More able pupils have good opportunities to extend their ideas and the less able and pupils with additional learning needs make good progress. This is particularly so on the Key Skills Level 2 course.

Post 16

Good and outstanding features

- 328 Students demonstrate outstanding understanding in their application of binary and hexadecimal number.
- 329 Students' implementation, evaluation and testing of computing solutions is outstanding.
- 330 Projects are often innovative, displaying evidence of effective analysis, investigation and problem solving.
- 331 Students show a good understanding of theory and present their work well.
- 332 Project work displays good programming skills.

Shortcomings

Key stage 3

333 Pupils do not develop sufficiently the more sophisticated interrogation skills and use of formulae in their handling and modelling of information.

Key stage 4

334 Pupils who create their projects from imaginary contexts limit their opportunities for research and evaluation.

Post 16

335 There are no significant shortcomings.

History

Key stage 3: Grade 2 Good features and no important shortcomings

Key stage 4: Grade 1 Good with outstanding features

Post 16: Grade 1 Good with outstanding features

336 GCSE results have been well above both the local and national averages for the last three years.

337 At A level, the results have also been well above both the local and national averages for the last three years.

Good features

Key stage 3

338 Pupils have good levels of knowledge and understanding and they recall their previous learning successfully. Most are confident in applying these skills to new topics and historical problems.

339 Pupils show a good ability to identify and explain the causes of change over time. They trace the consequences of change effectively and have a good awareness of chronology. By Y9, pupils can distinguish between short-term and long-term causes of historical change.

340 Pupils can extract accurate and relevant information from a wide range of sources of historical evidence. They make meaningful links between the sources of evidence and their own background knowledge of a topic.

341 Pupils make good progress in testing the sources of evidence for reliability, usefulness and bias. By Y9, pupils successfully recognise propaganda in the sources and can explain its operation and significance.

342 Most pupils evaluate the sources of evidence effectively and use them well to construct well balanced arguments. They are confident in adopting an investigative approach to the problems which they consider. They have good and effective approaches to historical enquiry.

- 343 Good quality written work demonstrates pupils' growing ability to record their learning in a variety of ways and for different purposes. They select, communicate and organise information in their written tasks sensibly and reasonably.
- 344 Pupils' oral work is generally good. They use subject-specific vocabulary accurately and in the correct context.
- 345 Pupils' knowledge of the history and culture of Wales is very well developed and is enhanced by the very effective use of their local environment.

Good and outstanding features

Key stage 4

- 346 Y10 pupils produce coursework of outstanding quality. They use documentary and archaeological evidence confidently and show an outstanding ability to weigh and measure the significance of sources of evidence containing conflicting information. In this work, pupils demonstrate outstanding problem solving skills. Their approach to independent learning is exemplary.
- 347 They make outstanding progress in analysing and evaluating complex sources of evidence. They compare sources confidently and use their historical skills very well in order to arrive at valid and well reasoned oral and written arguments.
- 348 Pupils demonstrate an outstanding understanding of the complex beliefs and practices associated with medieval medicine. Role play activities and the use of a variety of artefacts ensure that the quality of their learning is outstanding.
- 349 Pupils' written work is very well organised and some of their presentational skills are outstanding. They use ICT to very good effect, both for individual research and for the presentation of booklets. Extended writing skills are very well developed by the end of the key stage.
- 350 Pupils show a growing maturity in the depth of their response to challenging historical problems. They are increasingly well focused upon providing satisfying explanations for the differing motivations and attitudes of people in the past by asking more complex questions of the sources of evidence.

Post 16

- 351 Students' ability to construct reasoned and balanced oral and written arguments, based on the relevant evidence is outstanding. They are very successful in identifying and examining a variety of complex factors when addressing challenging historical problems.
- 352 They achieve outstanding standards in the evaluation and analysis of sources of evidence. They have a very good ability to assess the significance of the attributions of these sources, using their understanding to arrive at sophisticated and convincing conclusions.
- 353 Students have very good skills in developing oral arguments. Fluent and articulate contributions to discussions show a growing maturity and confidence.

- 354 Students show an outstanding ability to synthesise the views of the major professional historians with expertise in the periods they are studying. They have a secure grasp of the differences between traditional and revisionist interpretations. They use their analytical and evaluative skills very effectively to explain these differences. Their grasp of historiography is outstanding.
- 355 Y12 and Y13 students have a very good ability to use their knowledge and the evidence from the sources to construct well argued opposing and balanced arguments in their written work. The depth of analysis in essays and source evaluation is outstanding.
- 356 Students display a very mature approach to the development of their independent learning skills. They take personal responsibility for extending their research activities and they read widely in order to ensure that they reach the highest standards of which they are capable.

Shortcomings

Key stage 3

- 357 A small minority of pupils do not respond to written tasks in sufficient depth and detail to ensure that they fully address the demands of the question they are considering. In a very few cases, there is evidence of incomplete written work.
- 358 A small number of pupils do not provide extended oral responses to class discussions.

Key stage 4 and Post 16

- 359 There are no important shortcomings.

Religious education (including religious studies)
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Key stage 3:	Grade 1	Good with outstanding features
Key stage 4:	Grade 1	Good with outstanding features
Post 16:	Grade 1	Good with outstanding features

- 360 The percentage of pupils who have gained GCSE grades A* to C over the last three years has been substantially higher than the figures for UA and for Wales.
- 361 Over the last three years the percentages of students who have gained A level grades A to C has been similar to local and national averages, although the provisional results for 2007 are much higher than both.

Good and Outstanding features

Key stage 3

- 362 Pupils across the ability range have an outstanding factual knowledge and understanding of the units of work studied, which reflect the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus.

- 363 Pupils have outstanding knowledge of how believers of various religions worship and celebrate their faith, and how their lives are shaped by their beliefs.
- 364 Pupils are able to interpret the symbols of the six main world religions and relate them to the respective beliefs.
- 365 Throughout the key stage, pupils' knowledge and understanding is deepened by skilfully researching topics in pairs and groups. They select information and communicate it effectively to the rest of the class.
- 366 Pupils with additional learning needs are well integrated, and are achieving well, showing good knowledge of the topics taught.

Key stage 4

- 367 Pupils have an outstanding knowledge and understanding of the moral and social issues taught and can describe some of the differing viewpoints of religions to these issues.
- 368 They have an outstanding understanding of how the relationship between other people's beliefs, teaching and actions influences their lifestyles. They are able to discuss attitudes towards sensitive topics and make mature conclusions.
- 369 They are developing the ability to interpret different beliefs and practices as a means of making sense of human experiences.
- 370 Pupils are acquiring a relevant range of skills that enable them to explore religion and human experiences for themselves and to express their own responses to the questions and issues that are raised in the process.

Post 16

- 371 Students have outstanding knowledge and understanding of the behaviour and beliefs of the believers of various faiths studied.
- 372 They show outstanding analytical skills when they compare, contrast and evaluate the doctrines of religions on topics such as abortion.
- 373 Their ability to draw sound conclusions when they investigate and evaluate aspects of a religion that raises complex questions and issues is outstanding.
- 374 Essays are of a good standard, show considerable depth of understanding and make good reference to evidence, examples and scholarly opinion.
- 375 Students analyse and give valid reasons for different perspectives on issues such as abortion, and reflect well on the beliefs, values and tradition of different religions.

Shortcomings

Key stage 4

- 376 A minority of pupils have difficulty in communicating in writing the beliefs and opinions that they outstandingly expressed orally.

Post 16

377 A minority of students are slower to develop fluency in whole class debate.

Drama

Key stage 4: Grade 2 Good features and no important shortcomings
Post 16: Grade 1 Good with outstanding features

378 Examination results in drama at GCSE in the last three years have been above national averages for grades A* to C. Provisional results for 2007 follow the consistent pattern of high attainment and are substantially higher than the results for the whole of Wales. As there is no drama in the curriculum for key stage 3 pupils these results represent good progress.

379 Examination results in drama at A level in the last two years have been above national averages for grades A to C.

Good features

Key stage 4

380 Pupils of all abilities, including those with additional learning needs, achieve well. Pupils have made progress in their awareness of audience. They understand and use space, a range of gestures, vocal techniques and sound effects in communicating feelings to an audience. They also understand a range of theatrical styles including melodrama.

381 Most pupils display good skills in speaking and listening. In Y11 these skills are outstanding. They listen respectfully and attentively to the teacher and one another and respond very promptly ensuring that they work at a rapid pace.

382 There is outstanding knowledge and use of a wide range of performance techniques, particularly those of physical theatre. In group improvisation, they demonstrate effective use of strategies such as repetition, slow motion, spot lighting and angel/devil.

383 Class and group collaboration is good and effective. In Y11 it is outstanding. In planning improvisations, they respond to each other quickly and positively. Individuals put forward ideas for performance in groups and take on the role of director. Others respond to ideas, put forward counter suggestions and decisions are effectively negotiated. 'Warm up' activities also show good development of supportive group behaviour.

384 Pupils effectively engage in peer assessment. They identify techniques used well by other groups. They use subject specific vocabulary appropriately and make constructive comments for improving performances.

385 Written work is of a good standard. Pupils write in response to a range of stimuli. They show how they can construct plots, dialogues and narratives from pictures, stories and poetry. Pupils also demonstrate good understanding of the conventions of script writing. Their own scripts are of a good standard.

Good and outstanding features

Post 16

- 386 There is outstanding collaboration in class, pair and small group work. Students co-operate very well as they engage in a wide range of acting activities including role on the wall, tableaux and hot-seating. They put forward ideas for performance, refer to texts to justify opinions and negotiate decisions. They respond well to challenging texts and work at a fast pace.
- 387 Textual analysis is often outstanding. There is very good interpretation of challenging texts including interpretation of language, characters, motives, playwright's intentions and styles.
- 388 Students know and understand the criteria for success in performance skills including styles of physical theatre, character portrayal and vocal techniques. Almost without exception, students sustain role with appropriate voice, gesture and expressive movement as well as good awareness of audience. Students often convey complex emotions and ideas convincingly to an audience of their peers.
- 389 They understand the role of the director in retaining the essence of a play whilst adapting it to convey personal interpretation. They apply this knowledge to improvised scenes and know what meaning they wish to convey, decide on the order of events and the style of the improvisations. Students take directions and many direct the work of their peers effectively.
- 390 They confidently engage in peer assessment, demonstrating a good understanding of criteria and appropriate use of subject vocabulary.
- 391 Written work is of a good standard and there are examples of very good work. Extended critical evaluations in particular are often well structured and detailed. They show a very good understanding of a wide range of techniques, plot, characters and themes. Critical comments are appropriately referenced.

Shortcomings

Key stage 4

- 392 A small number lack confidence when performing to the whole class.
- 393 Pupils in year 10 do not always focus on tasks. A small number chat when others are speaking.

Post 16

- 394 In a few cases, when adopting the role of the director, there is insufficient focus on text to fully guide performance.

School's response to the inspection

The headteacher, staff and governors of Castell Alun High School are delighted that the inspection report confirms the school's commitment to, and success in providing high quality learning experiences for all. We consider that the award of the highest grade in each of the seven key questions is an outstanding achievement and the report acknowledges that staff at all levels work hard to ensure the best possible outcomes for the young people in their care.

Inspectors identified that high levels of attendance, excellent behaviour and attitudes result in very good academic and personal achievements and further demonstrate the commitment expressed in our mission statement and code of conduct. The drive for continuous improvement is evidenced in many areas of the report and shows that Castell Alun has continuously improved since the previous inspection in 2002.

We are extremely proud of the grades awarded, both for the standards achieved in the six subjects that were inspected and the whole-school judgments made in relation to the quality of teaching and assessment in all lessons observed. Our whole-school focus on developing excellence in the classroom has been identified by the inspection team and confirms that the direction in which we are taking the school is the right one.

The school is pleased that the report identifies pupils and students as having very positive attitudes to learning. This is viewed as a direct response to the quality of teaching they receive and the outstanding way in which they work with each other and with their teachers. The inspection team's judgments further reinforce the development of pupils' personal, social and learning skills where enthusiasm, courtesy and respect prevail and that our pupils and students are outstanding ambassadors when representing the school.

We welcome the report's endorsement of the quality and provision of our extra-curricular programme, our links with the community and opportunities offered beyond the classroom that motivate and extend learning experiences. We are also pleased that the support the school receives from parents and other partners is acknowledged and that our outstanding links with the primary consortium make the transition to Castell Alun a positive and successful experience.

The school's self-evaluation processes, quality assurance systems and development planning are reported as having a positive effect on the drive for continuous improvement. The outstanding and consistent approach to leadership and management allows the school to fully succeed in achieving its aims.

We appreciate the recommendations made by the inspection team and these will be addressed rigorously through our current and future School Development Plans. This will provide an excellent platform for the school's future development. Castell Alun High School wishes to thank the registered inspector and his team for their professionalism, courtesy and the supportive manner in which they conducted the inspection.

Appendix 1

Basic information about the school

Name of school	Castell Alun High School
School type	Community
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Address of school	Fagl Lane Hope Flintshire
Postcode	LL12 9PY
Telephone number	01978 760238
Headteacher	Mr David Mountfort
Date of appointment	March 2004
Chair of governors / Appropriate authority	Cllr. T W Jones OBE
Reporting inspector	T A O'Marah
Dates of inspection	19 to 22 November 2007

Appendix 2

School data and indicators (January 2007)

Year group	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13	Total
Number of pupils	212	177	206	210	223	117	77	1222

Total number of teachers			
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time equivalent (fte)
Number of teachers	66	12	73.8

Staffing information	
Pupil: teacher (fte) ratio (excluding special classes)	16.5:1
Average teaching group size	26.9
Overall contact ratio (percentage)	74

Percentage attendance for three complete terms prior to the inspection								
	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13	Whole school
Term 1	93.7	94.4	93.3	92.5	91.4	95.1	94.4	93.9
Term 2	95.6	94.7	94.3	93.8	92.5	96.6	94.6	94.4
Term 3	93.4	92.8	92.1	91.4	97.4	96.7	97.9	93.9

Percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals	5
Number of pupils excluded during 12 months prior to inspection	44

Appendix 3

National Curriculum Assessment Results End of key stage 3:

National Curriculum Assessment KS3 results: 2007													
Total number of pupils in Y9 2006/2007: 206													
Percentage of pupils at each level													
			D	N	W	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8+
English	Teacher assessment	School	0	0	0	0	0	4.4	18.5	39.0	30.0	7.8	0
		National	0.2	0.6	0.5	0.4	1.4	6.8	21.4	35.7	24.1	8.5	0.2
Mathematics	Teacher assessment	School	0	0	0	0	0.5	4.4	5.3	14.1	40.5	25.2	0
		National	0.2	0.6	0.4	0.3	1.1	7.8	19.7	27.8	27.1	14.4	0.8
Science	Teacher assessment	School	0	0	0	0	0	4.9	9.2	38.8	30.6	16.5	0
		National	0.2	0.7	0.3	0.2	0.8	6.5	20.9	34.7	25.7	10.0	0.1

- D Pupils who have been disapplied, or pupils for whom teachers were unable to provide an assessment
 N Pupils not awarded a level for reasons other than disapplication
 W Pupils who are working towards level 1

Percentage of pupils attaining at least level 5 in mathematics, science and either English or Welsh (first language) by Teacher Assessment	
In the school	72
In Wales	56.7

Public Examination Results:

For pupils aged 15, results in GCSE, Entry Level Qualification, GNVQ and NVQ	
Number of pupils aged 15 on the school roll in January 2007	223
Average GCSE or GNVQ points score per pupil	49

The percentage of 15 year old pupils who in 2007:	School	UA	Wales
entered for 5 or more GCSEs or equivalent	98	89	87
attained at least 5 GCSE grades A* to C, the equivalent vocational qualifications or a combination of both	70	53	54
attained at least 5 GCSE grades A* to G, the equivalent vocational qualifications or a combination of both	98	88	86
attained GCSE grades A*-C in each of mathematics, science, English or Welsh first language (the core subject indicator)	64	41	40
entered at least one Entry level qualification, GCSE short course or GCSE	100	95	98
attained one or more GCSE grades A*-C or the vocational qualification equivalent	95	78	77
attained one or more GCSE grades A*-G or the vocational qualification equivalent	100	94	93
attained no graded GCSE or the vocational qualification equivalent	0	5	4
attained one or more Entry level qualification only	0	1	3
attained a GNVQ Part 1, a GNVQ at Foundation level or NVQ level 1	-	-	-
attained a GNVQ Part 1, a GNVQ at Intermediate level or NVQ level 2	-	-	-

For pupils aged 17, results in A/AS, GNVQs and NVQs	
Number of students aged 17 in January 2007	194
Number of students entered for 2 or more GCE A level examinations or equivalent in 2007	75
Number of students entered for fewer than 2 GCE A levels or equivalent in 2007	22

	School	UA	Wales
Percentage of students entered who achieved 2 or more grades A-C	63	61	67
Percentage of students entered who achieved 2 or more grades A-E	95	93	94
Average points score per candidate entering 2 or more subjects	20	19	20
Number of students who achieved a GNVQ Intermediate or NVQ at level 2	-	-	-
Number of students who achieved a GNVQ Advanced or NVQ at level 3	-	-	-

UA Unitary Authority

Appendix 4

Evidence base of the inspection

A team of 15 inspectors, including the school's nominee and a peer assessor, spent 4 days in the school.

Prior to the inspection, full discussions were held at the school, between the registered inspector and the headteacher, based on the school's self-evaluation report.

The registered inspector held meetings with staff, governors and parents (21 parents attended) prior to the inspection.

163 lessons were inspected, covering six subjects in detail and all teachers were observed. Three assemblies and 11 registration periods were attended.

Inspectors interviewed members of the leadership team, learning managers, student development managers and other staff with whole school responsibilities, including members of the support staff.

Pupils' work was scrutinised, both as part of a structured cross-curricular book review, and within lessons.

Inspectors held formal discussions with groups of pupils from each year group and with the School Council. They also talked to many pupils informally.

207 parents returned a questionnaire sent out by the school prior to the inspection.

Comprehensive documentation, including the school's self-evaluation report, was scrutinised before and during the inspection.

Appendix 5

Composition and responsibilities of the inspection team

Team Member	Responsibilities
Terry O'Marah	Registered inspector: key questions 1, 2, 5 and 6.
Mike Snow	Lay inspector: behaviour; attendance; community; work-related education; governors.
Glyn Davies	Science ; Core Team: key question 3.
Lyn Bithell	Drama ; Core Team: key question 2B; literacy; personal and social education.
Alan Edwards	Mathematics ; Core Team: key question 7; numeracy..
Heddwyn Evans	Religious education ; Core Team: key question 4; spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
Mary Crandon	Bilingualism; general observation.
Margaret Herbert	General observation; wider key skills.
Anne Newman	History .
Selwyn Gale	Information technology ; ICT.
David Jones	Science support .
Martyn Williams	General observation.
Susan Williams	General observation.
Paul Harrison	General observation.
John Hotchkiss	Peer Assessor; promotion of healthy lifestyles; general observation.

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Acknowledgement

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