

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

A Report on the Quality of Secondary Education in

**Amman Valley School
Ammanford
Margaret Street
SA18 2NW**

School Number: 669/4029

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by

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Amman Valley 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 Amman Valley School took place between 06/11/06 and 10/11/06. An independent team of inspectors, led by Ian Garth Higginbotham 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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Context

The nature of the school

- 1 Amman Valley School is a naturally bilingual school maintained by Carmarthenshire Unitary Authority (UA). It provides education for boys and girls aged from 11 to 18. At the time of the inspection, there were 1664 pupils on roll, a figure that is almost 5 percent higher than at the time of the previous inspection in 2000. There are almost 300 students in the sixth form. The ratio of boys to girls is about 52:48 in key stages 3 and 4 and about 42:58 in the sixth form.
- 2 The school is located in the northern part of the small industrial town of Ammanford (population 6,000) at the foot of the Black Mountains. About half the pupils come from the town itself and the other half from the surrounding rural area and villages. Over 250 pupils choose to travel from outside the school's natural catchment area. According to the school, a quarter of the pupils are neither privileged nor under-privileged but three-quarters of the pupils come from an economically disadvantaged area. The proportion of pupils entitled to receive free school meals is 16.0 percent; this is very similar to the figures for Carmarthenshire (15.3 percent) and the whole of Wales (16.6 percent).
- 3 Sixty-eight percent of pupils come from homes where the main language is English and 32 percent from homes where Welsh is the main language. Thirty-nine percent of pupils speak Welsh to first language standard. While the majority of pupils learn through the medium of English, there has, over many years, been a steady increase in the amount of bilingual teaching.
- 4 The previous attainment of pupils starting school in Year 7 covers the full range. There are 59 pupils (3.5 percent of pupils) who have a statement of special educational needs (SEN). The percentage is slightly lower than that for Carmarthenshire (4.1 percent). A further 9.0 percent of pupils with additional learning needs receive in-school support, while another 4.4 percent also receive help from other agencies. The school has disapplied part of the National Curriculum (NC) for five pupils.
- 5 There are 11 pupils who are in the care of a UA.
- 6 One pupil is receiving support in learning English as a second language
- 7 The leadership team comprises the headteacher, two deputy headteachers and six assistant headteachers.
- 8 The previous inspection of the school took place in the Autumn term 2000.

The school's priorities and targets

- 9 The school's aims are:
 - to provide a pleasant school community where pupils and staff can enjoy working;
 - to promote the full development of pupils' intellectual, social and physical skills and abilities;

- to provide equal opportunities for all pupils and to help them gain the qualifications that will facilitate their progression into further education and employment;
- to promote pupils' understanding of, and respect for people of different beliefs and cultures; and
- to enhance pupils' knowledge of and empathy for their cultural and linguistic inheritance and to provide opportunities for them to learn through both the English and Welsh language.

10 In the current three-year cycle to 2007, the main aspects for development are:

- pupils' key skills;
- pupils' attainment in examinations;
- self-evaluation by every section of the school, so that each one might take greater responsibility for its own continuous improvement;
- curriculum review, in line with national development for 14 to 19 year olds;
- pupils' attendance rates; and
- systems for recording, analysing and using performance data.

Summary

11 This is a school with many good and several outstanding features. Managers set demanding targets and are successful in meeting almost all of them. Therefore, the quality of provision is continuing to improve and the standards of pupils' attainment are rising.

Table of grades awarded

	Key Question	Inspection grade
1	How well do learners achieve?	2
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?	3
4	How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1
5	How effective are leadership and strategic management?	2
6	How well do leaders and managers evaluate and improve quality and standards?	2
7	How efficient are leaders and managers in using resources?	1

12 The grades in the above table match the grades in managers' self-assessment for key questions 1, 4, 5, 6 and 7. In key question 2, we agreed with managers' judgement on the quality of assessment, but considered that the quality of teaching had improved since they had collected their evidence. Our grade was therefore one grade higher than managers had awarded. In key question 3, we agreed with almost

all the judgements of managers, but awarded one grade lower than they had done because the school fails to meet one statutory requirement (see paragraph 34 and Key Question 3).

Standards

Grades for standards in subjects inspected

Inspection Area	Key stage 3	Key stage 4	Sixth form
Welsh (first language)	3	2	3
Mathematics	2	2	2
Science	3	2	2
Information technology	2	2	2
Art	2	1	1
Music	2	2	1

- 13 The following table shows the grades we awarded for the standards that pupils and students achieved in lessons in the six subjects we inspected.

89 lessons	% Grade 1	% Grade 2	% Grade 3	% Grade 4	% Grade 5
Key stage 3	5	50	38	7	0
Key stage 4	15	66	19	0	0
Combined KS3 & 4	9	56	31	4	0
Sixth form	19	67	14	0	0
Whole school	11	58	27	3	0

(For an explanation of the grades, please refer to the start of the report)

Key stages 3 and 4

- 14 Overall, pupils' achievement in the six subjects we inspected is broadly in line with targets for the whole of Wales. Standards have improved substantially since the last inspection.
- 15 Over the last three years, pupils' attainment in key stage 3 has been better, in many respects, than that in half the schools in Wales. The picture is similar when the comparison is with similar schools. In key stage 4, the same is true for the comparison with all schools. However, recent improvements in standards have taken the school's performance well up into the top quarter of similar schools. Good features in key stage 4 include:
- a high figure for the core subject indicator¹, that has improved a lot over recent years;
 - a high average figure for pupils' total point score²; and
 - a much higher than average percentage of pupils who gain five GCSE qualifications at grades A* to C.

¹ The core subject indicator in key stage 3 is the percentage of pupils who gain level 5 or better in the core subjects of Welsh or English, mathematics and science, and in key stage 4 is the percentage of pupils who gain at least grade C in each of these three subjects in GCSE examinations.

² Grade A* gains 8 points; grade G gains 1.

- 16 Value-added data, which measure pupils' attainment in key stage 4 in relation to their attainment in key stages 2 and 3, show that pupils' progress is significantly faster than the average for Wales.
- 17 Pupils with SEN achieve well. There is good support for pupils in key stage 3 whose reading and writing skills are weak. There are good systems to identify pupils who are more able and talented and these pupils generally gain excellent examination grades. Pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds achieve very well. Pupils in the care of a UA achieve well, provided they stay in the school for several years.
- 18 Pupils listen, speak and read well in English. Their writing is not of such a high standard, but is improving. Pupils from all linguistic backgrounds gain good levels of skill in speaking, reading and listening to Welsh, but their writing is generally much weaker. Pupils' bilingual skills develop well.
- 19 Pupils generally have good numerical skills and use computers competently. They work well with other pupils, enjoy problem-solving tasks and show good levels of creativity. They are generally aware of their strengths and are prepared to work on their weaknesses. They develop well personally and socially.
- 20 Pupils behave well. Their overall attendance figure has risen to about 91.5 percent, but this is still too low.

The sixth form

- 21 Students' attainment has improved substantially over recent years. The percentage of A level grades in the range A to C is significantly higher than for the whole of Wales. Attainment is particularly good in the four vocational A level subjects. Large numbers of students gain key skills qualifications.

The quality of education

- 22 The following table shows the grades we awarded for the quality of teaching and assessment in all the lessons we inspected.

162 lessons	% Grade 1	% Grade 2	% Grade 3	% Grade 4	% Grade 5
Key stage 3	13	58	24	5	0
Key stage 4	22	63	13	2	0
Combined KS 3 & 4	16	60	20	4	0
Sixth form	25	70	3	3	0
Whole school	19	62	15	4	0

(For an explanation of the grades, please refer to the start of the report)

Key stages 3 and 4

- 23 The quality of teaching is generally good and there are outstanding features in a significant percentage of lessons, particularly in key stage 4. The quality of teaching has improved substantially since the last inspection.

- 24 The quality of assessment, recording and reporting is good. The school has a wealth of data on pupils' attainment and uses it well to make managers, teachers and the pupils themselves aware of the levels and grades the pupils should be attaining. Teachers challenge pupils to improve, and support them in doing so. The quality of marking of pupils' day-to-day work varies from teacher to teacher. The clarity of reports to parents also varies. There are some excellent examples but, generally, neither the marking nor the report sufficiently pinpoints a pupil's strengths and weaknesses, or shows clearly how the pupil could improve.
- 25 The curriculum promotes a broad and balanced education. All pupils in key stage 3 study drama and pupils in Year 9 can learn a second foreign language. In key stage 4, all pupils complete a short GCSE course in information technology. The curriculum is offering increasing opportunities for pupils to improve their key skills. There is an outstanding range of extra-curricular activities. However, not all pupils have the opportunity to participate in a daily act of collective worship.
- 26 The curriculum appropriately promotes pupils' awareness of sustainable development and global citizenship. There are strong partnerships with parents, the local community, employers, and other educational providers, including initial teacher training colleges. There is good quality work-related education.
- 27 The care, support and guidance of pupils have many outstanding features. Pupils have good educational and careers advice throughout their school career. The provision for pupils with SEN also has several outstanding features.

The sixth form

- 28 The quality of teaching is good. It is much better than at the time of the previous inspection.
- 29 The quality of assessment, recording and reporting is outstanding. Students receive detailed and regular feedback on their performance and how they can improve.
- 30 The curriculum is outstandingly broad. In addition to a wide range of A-level and vocational courses, students can gain accreditation in up to three key skills. There is also a 'Key Issues' programme, where students discuss current affairs and issues of moral and religious significance. The curriculum is outstanding in the way it promotes equal opportunities and encourages pupils to value diversity in society.

Leadership and management

- 31 The headteacher and other senior managers have a clear vision of an excellent school. As they have worked, with imagination and enthusiasm, to make this vision a reality, so the quality of provision has improved and the standards that pupils achieve have risen substantially.
- 32 The quality of the work of middle managers is more variable. They understand the vision of senior managers, but some have been more effective than others in planning and implementing the strategies needed to make it a reality.

- 33 The school's use of data on pupils' performance has been a key element in raising standards. Analyses of the data have helped the school recognise its strengths and direct its efforts to redress its shortcomings.
- 34 Governors share the vision of the headteacher and senior managers. They play an effective role in managing the school and fulfil all their statutory obligations except to ensure that every pupil takes part in a daily act of collective worship. They closely monitor the budget and direct resources in support of the priorities in the school development plan.
- 35 Senior managers have a thorough knowledge of every aspect of the school's provision and of the standards that pupils achieve. There are sound, broad-ranging strategies for self-evaluation. The self-evaluation by departments and other areas of the school is generally not sharp enough in identifying shortcomings or their underlying causes. The evaluations are not sufficiently based on a thorough analysis of pupils' attainment.
- 36 The quality of the self-evaluation report that the school prepared for this inspection was outstanding. It is firmly rooted in first-hand evidence and presents a clear and accurate picture of the school.
- 37 The school development plan is of high quality. It has a small number of appropriate priorities. Managers and governors regularly review progress in implementing the plan.
- 38 Teachers are well qualified and regularly attend courses to update their skills. The work of members of the administrative staff and of Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) is very effective.
- 39 The quality and quantity of learning resources are very good. There is outstandingly good provision of information and communications technology (ICT) equipment.
- 40 The accommodation has outstanding features. The school manages the large and complex site outstandingly well.
- 41 Financial planning by senior managers and governors focuses sharply on curriculum needs and the priorities set out in development plans. The school provides good value for money.

Recommendations

- R1 Managers and teachers should satisfy the statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship for pupils*.
- R2 Managers and teachers should work to improve standards in the subjects where there are shortcomings.
- R3 Teachers should extend the good practice in marking and assessment so that, in all subjects, pupils fully understand their strengths and shortcomings and what they must do to improve.
- R4 Heads of departments should conduct more rigorous self-evaluation, based on a thorough analysis of pupils' attainment, and work to eliminate the shortcomings they identify.

* This matter was a key issue in the previous inspection report.

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 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

- 42 The grade we awarded agrees with the grade that managers awarded in their self-evaluation report.

Key stages 3 and 4

- 43 The following table shows the grades we awarded for the standards that pupils achieved in lessons in the six subjects we inspected.

68 lessons	% Grade 1	% Grade 2	% Grade 3	% Grade 4	% Grade 5
Key stage 3	5	50	38	7	0
Key stage 4	15	66	19	0	0
Combined KS 3 & 4	9	56	31	4	0

(For an explanation of the grades, please refer to the start of the report)

- 44 Targets for the whole of Wales are that, by 2007, standards should be grade 3 or better in at least 98 percent of lessons and grade 2 or better in at least 65 percent of lessons. Overall, in the six subjects we inspected, pupils' achievement is broadly in line with these national targets. Pupils' standards of achievement have improved substantially since the last inspection.

Pupils' success in attaining agreed learning goals

- 45 We evaluated pupils' performance in public examinations and national tests by comparing their attainment with:
- the attainment of pupils in all schools in Wales; and
 - the attainment of pupils in similar schools throughout Wales, where between 15 percent and 20 percent of pupils are entitled to free school meals.
- 46 Over the last three years, pupils' attainment in key stage 3 has been better, in many respects, than that in half the schools in both these comparison groups. Teacher assessments show that there are some subjects where pupils' attainment is better than in three quarters of other schools, yet there are a similar number in which attainment is lower than in three quarters of other schools. However, there has been good improvement from year to year in English and Welsh. Attainment in English is particularly high; there are very few similar schools where pupils attain more highly.
- 47 In key stage 4, pupils' attainment is better than in half the schools in Wales. However, recent improvements in standards have taken the school's performance well up into the top quarter of similar schools. Good features include:
- a high figure for the core subject indicator, that has improved a lot over recent years; and
 - a high average figure for pupils' total points score, even though pupils study only three optional subjects.

- 48 The percentage of pupils who gain five GCSE qualifications at grades A* to C is now much higher than the average for Wales. Furthermore, a higher than average percentage of these grades is in the core subjects, so pupils have a firm foundation for study at a higher level.
- 49 Data that track pupils' attainment through key stages 2, 3 and 4 show that pupils' progress is significantly faster than the average for Wales. Many of the figures that measure pupils' attainment are also rising faster than the Welsh averages. For example, since 2000, in key stage 3:
- the percentages of pupils who gain level 5 has increased, on average, by over 2 percentage points a year in Welsh, English and science; and
 - the core subject indicator has risen twice as fast as the figure for Wales;
- and in key stage 4:
- the percentage of pupils who gain five or more GCSE qualifications at grades A* to C has risen at almost twice the rate for the whole of Wales; and
 - the figure for the core subject indicator has a rate of rise that far outstrips that for Wales.
- 50 On average, the standards that girls attain are higher than those of the boys. Nevertheless, in key stage 3, the core subject indicator for boys is only a little lower than that for girls and the difference is smaller than the average for Wales. In mathematics and science, boys attain slightly better than girls, but in Welsh and English, the girls attain much more highly. The differences are generally similar to those for the whole of Wales, but are bigger in Welsh. In key stage 4, girls attain higher than boys on almost every indicator. The differences are similar to those across Wales, but are slightly greater than the Wales average for the core subject indicator and for the average GCSE score per pupil.
- 51 Pupils with SEN achieve well. There is good support for pupils in key stage 3 whose reading and writing skills are weak. These pupils make good progress. Wherever possible, pupils with SEN in key stage 4 follow GCSE level courses and generally achieve an appropriate level of qualification.
- 52 There is very good identification of pupils who are more able and talented. These pupils generally gain excellent examination grades. Nevertheless, the main area in which value-added data suggest there may be some underachievement is in the number of pupils who attain GCSE grades A* and A.
- 53 Pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds achieve very well. The average of their total GCSE points score is higher than the average for the whole school.
- 54 Pupils in the care of a UA achieve well, provided they stay in the school for several years. About half the looked-after children are not settled in one home and tend to move from school to school. These pupils generally make little progress and achieve few qualifications.
- 55 Pupils communicate well in English. Their skills in speaking, listening and reading are good and strongly support their learning. They use technical terms correctly in the different subjects they study. Many pupils do not achieve as well in writing,

particularly those in key stage 3 and the lower-attaining pupils in key stage 4. However, strategies to improve pupils' writing skills are leading to improvements in pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar.

- 56 In Welsh, pupils listen respectfully to their teachers and to each other and speak well in class discussions in all subjects. They read well. Generally, they have good intonation when they read aloud. They can collate information from different sources. Pupils with reading difficulties make good progress. Pupils' writing skills are weaker than their other skills, particularly in key stage 3, where many pupils' grammar and spelling are insecure. Standards improve in key stage 4 and many pupils who study through the medium of Welsh gain good GCSE results.
- 57 Pupils' bilingual skills develop well and pupils who study Welsh as a second language make good progress. Pupils who follow 60 percent of the key stage 3 curriculum through the medium of Welsh move easily between Welsh and English. Many pupils who follow 40 percent of the curriculum through the medium of Welsh are confident in English but are hesitant when using specialist vocabulary in Welsh.
- 58 Pupils generally have good numerical skills. Their spatial awareness develops well through subjects such as art and design and technology. Pupils use graphs and charts well in geography and Welsh. In mathematics and science, they gain confidence in manipulating formulae.
- 59 Pupils use computers and a range of other devices confidently. They achieve good levels of skill in finding, and processing information and presenting it in ways suitable for their audience. They use their skills well to support their learning in several subjects, including English, Welsh and art. However, they are less skilled in using spreadsheets and databases and do not use computers as effectively in other subjects, including mathematics, science, and history.
- 60 Pupils are good at solving problems. When teachers present activities in the form of a problem, pupils show plenty of imagination and enterprise in investigating issues, collecting data, putting forward possible approaches and choosing and refining the best solution.
- 61 Pupils are often creative in the ways they develop and present their ideas. They use the Internet and the school's intranet well to find ideas they can work on. Much of their work in art, design and technology, drama, English, music, physical education and Welsh shows flair and imagination.
- 62 Pupils cooperate very well in pairs and groups. They work in a focused way towards their goal, contributing ideas and listening thoughtfully and respectfully to others.
- 63 Pupils respond well to teachers' written and oral comments on their work. They value the clear assessments they receive during interviews with form tutors, senior staff and mentors. Nearly all recognise their own strengths and weaknesses and are prepared to work hard to improve their levels of attainment.

Pupils' progress in learning

- 64 Pupils make good progress in their learning. They arrive at class punctually with the equipment they need and settle quickly to work. In many lessons, an introduction

makes them aware of the knowledge and understanding they should gain and of the skills they should learn and use during the lesson. They bear these matters in mind throughout the lesson. Pupils make good progress from one key stage to another. Their attitudes and skills equip them well for further study and for the world of work.

- 65 Pupils know the standards they are aiming for by the end of the key stage and are becoming more aware of the level at which they are currently working. In some of their daily work in class and in their homework, however, they are not sufficiently aware of the good and poorer aspects of their work or of the ways in which they could improve.

The development of pupils' personal and social skills

- 66 Pupils develop well personally and socially. They show care for others through structures such as the 'buddy' system and in raising large amounts of money for good causes. They are friendly and polite and have a clear sense of right and wrong and of fair play. They are willing to accept responsibility. In personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons, they demonstrate an acceptance of diversity in society and openness to the views and beliefs of others.
- 67 Pupils' overall attendance rates for the last twelve months are about 91.5 percent. This figure is boosted by the very good attendance of pupils in key stage 4 in the summer term. Otherwise, attendance is around 90 percent. This figure is too low. There is very little unauthorised absence.
- 68 Pupils generally behave well. They show consideration to others, behave well in lessons and move around the school maturely. Only a small minority of lessons are affected by poor behaviour or pupils' inattention. Generally, pupils respond well to the close monitoring of their behaviour and the rewards for good conduct. The school has not permanently excluded any pupil in the last twelve months.

The sixth form

- 69 The following table shows the grades we awarded for the standards that students achieved in lessons in the six subjects we inspected.

21 lessons	% Grade 1	% Grade 2	% Grade 3	% Grade 4	% Grade 5
Sixth form	19	67	14	0	0

(For an explanation of the grades, please refer to the start of the report)

Students' success in attaining agreed learning goals

- 70 Students' attainment has improved substantially over recent years. The percentage of A level grades in the range A to C is significantly higher than the percentage for the whole of Wales. The average points score per student matches the figure for Wales. Attainment is particularly good in the four vocational A level subjects, where 84 percent of the results are grades A to C. Last year, 14 students gained GNVQ qualifications (12 at intermediate level and two at foundation level) in business, health and social care, and leisure and tourism.
- 71 Large numbers of students gain key skills qualifications. In the past year, 30 percent of students in Year 13 gained three qualifications, 30 percent gained two and

29 percent gained one. Students are highly aware of their competence in all skills. Their determination to improve their skills boosts the quality of their work in every subject they study.

- 72 The percentage of pupils from Year 11 who return to the sixth form has increased to 66 percent. This is a high figure, in the light of the range of educational provision for students locally. The percentage of students who leave school after starting a sixth-form course has been rather high in the past, but has now declined. Most of these cases are of students studying vocational courses, who leave school to take up employment.

Students' progress in learning

- 73 Students make good progress in their learning. They are becoming independent learners and generally show a high level of commitment to their work. They are well able to find information, assess its validity and relevance, process it in different ways and present it in a form appropriate for its intended audience. Students are gaining the skills and attitudes they will need for success in study at a higher level and in employment. Life in the sixth form equips students well to enjoy their leisure time and to become good citizens.
- 74 Students respond well to the clear information they receive on their progress and take appropriate steps to review and advance their performance.

Development of students' personal and social skills

- 75 Students behave maturely. They are proud of their school and set a good example to younger pupils in everything they do. Many of them can speak extremely well about their work and other general issues. They are serious in their consideration of social and moral issues.
- 76 Students' attendance rate is close to 100 percent in the term of summer examinations. In the other two terms, it is about 91 percent. This figure is too low.

The quality of education and training

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

Grade 1: Good with outstanding features

- 77 The grade we awarded is one grade higher than managers awarded in their self-evaluation report. In quite a high percentage of lessons, the teaching has outstanding features. The quality of teaching has improved in the months since managers collected data for their self-evaluation report.

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

- 78 The following table shows the grades we awarded for the quality of teaching and assessment in all the lessons we inspected in key stages 3 and 4.

122 lessons	% Grade 1	% Grade 2	% Grade 3	% Grade 4	% Grade 5
Key stage 3	13	58	24	5	0
Key stage 4	22	63	13	2	0
Combined KS 3 & 4	16	60	20	4	0

(For an explanation of the grades, please refer to the start of the report)

- 79 The quality of teaching is generally good and there are outstanding features in a significant percentage of lessons, particularly in key stage 4. The quality of teaching has improved substantially since the last inspection. In comparison to schools across Wales, there is slightly less teaching at grade 2 or better, but slightly more at grade 1.
- 80 Generally, the teaching is of good quality. For the most part, the content of the lesson is pertinent, the pace brisk, the explanations clear and the activities stimulating. The outcome is that pupils learn well and their skills increase. In the context of such a lesson, where pupils are working with commitment and thinking critically, quite common elements often become outstanding. These include:
- an opportunity for pupils to set some of their own objectives;
 - a few moments for pupils to think about the key skills they will use, and how they can use them really well;
 - an explanation or demonstration of characteristics of work at the highest levels;
 - a variety of stimulating timed activities, each of which reinforces the learning of the previous one;
 - an illustration of abstract concepts using real-life situations;
 - opportunities for pupils to assess each other's work maturely and sensitively; and
 - a rigorous closing session that reinforces what pupils have learnt and provokes them to think more about the topic before the next lesson.
- 81 Shortcomings in the teaching are, in most lessons, outweighed by the good features. In a small number of lessons, however, the shortcomings significantly impair the quality of pupils' learning. Many of these shortcomings relate to teachers' poor management of the class and of pupils' behaviour. Other shortcomings include:

- the setting of too many activities, so that pupils cannot work in depth on any one of them;
- missed opportunities for pupils to develop a key skill;
- missed opportunities to provide an extra challenge for more able and talented pupils;
- answering for the pupils, rather than giving them time and support to think out their own answers; and
- accepting important mistakes in pupils' written work.

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

- 82 The quality of assessment, recording and reporting is good.
- 83 Records of pupils' attainment during their primary school years and of standardised tests that pupils sit early in Year 7 present a clear picture of pupils' attainment and of their competence across a range of skills. This information powerfully identifies pupils who need extra support and others who are more able and talented. Together with computer forecasts based on pupils' past attainment, the data allow managers to set attainment targets for every pupil, as well as targets for each department and the whole school.
- 84 Managers update this database throughout each pupil's school career. The data make it easy to identify pupils who are not living up to the promise of their earlier attainment. The database also holds Information on pupils' behaviour and teachers regularly update it.
- 85 During the academic year, teachers record three assessment scores for each pupil. These show the level at which a pupil is working, the effort he or she is making and the extent to which he or she participates in class work. This information forms the basis for a twice-yearly review of each pupil's progress. Pupils discuss the quality of their work with their subject and form teachers. With their teachers, they agree targets for their work over the next few months and record these in their Home-School Contact Book. In Year 11, every pupil has a further progress review in an interview with a deputy headteacher.
- 86 Managers carefully analyse any differences between teachers' estimates of pupils' potential and estimates generated by computer. They use this information skilfully to show pupils they have room for improvement. Departmental teachers are starting to make more use of these data. The database also presents a powerful picture to parents if they visit the school to discuss their child's progress.
- 87 The annual report to parents includes subject reports and an overview written by the form tutor. The perceptiveness and clarity of these reports vary considerably. In a few subjects, particularly English and Welsh, the reports provide detailed information on what the pupil does well or not so well and describe quite precisely what the pupil can do to improve. In contrast, reports in a few other subjects offer little useful information. There is an annual programme of meetings for parents and carers to discuss their children's work with their teachers.
- 88 The school fulfils statutory requirements for assessing and reporting pupils' achievements.

- 89 Teachers mark pupils' work frequently and accurately. However, there is variation from teacher to teacher in the extent to which that marking gives pupils a clear indication of how well they are getting on and how they can do better. Some teachers offer constructive guidance with challenging targets for improvement; others offer few insights into what the pupil does really well and what is not so good, and set targets that are too general. Overall, the marking, even of selected pieces of work, is not sufficiently informative.

The sixth form

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

- 90 The following table shows the grades we awarded for the quality of teaching and assessment in all the lessons we inspected in the sixth form.

40 lessons	% Grade 1	% Grade 2	% Grade 3	% Grade 4	% Grade 5
The sixth form	25	70	3	3	0

(For an explanation of the grades, please refer to the start of the report)

- 91 The quality of teaching is good. It is much better than at the time of the previous inspection. There are outstanding features in a quarter of lessons and only very rarely are there significant shortcomings.
- 92 Many of the good and outstanding features are similar to those in lessons in key stages 3 and 4. In addition, teachers:
- use their thorough knowledge of a subject to bring it to life for students and to enthuse them to engage with it;
 - use the interactive whiteboard as a way of bringing artefacts into the classroom for students' detailed scrutiny;
 - appraise students' work at the start of a lesson and identify improvements in a second appraisal at the end of the lesson;
 - listen carefully to students and develop points from what they are saying;
 - present an example of how to analyse a text critically; and
 - set homework that takes students to a level beyond that which they have achieved in the lesson.

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

- 93 The quality of assessment, recording and reporting is outstanding.
- 94 Feedback to students, both orally and in writing, on how to improve their standards is detailed and regular. Teachers know their students' strengths and weaknesses and use clear strategies to develop their abilities in aspects where they are weak.
- 95 Managers carefully monitor the records of students' progress. If they consider students' performance has slipped below that of which they are capable, they interview the students, identify the causes of the decline and set targets for improvement. The thoroughness with which they conduct this process is outstanding.

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

Grade 3: Good features outweigh shortcomings

96 In its self-evaluation report, the school awarded a grade 2 for this key question. The findings of the inspection team match almost all the judgements of managers. However, the school does not provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. This is a breach of a statutory requirement and is therefore an important shortcoming.

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

97 The curriculum:

- meets pupils' learning needs and reflects the aims set out for pupils of statutory school age in the Education Act 1996;
- provides appropriate breadth, balance and progression of study;
- gives equality of opportunity and access for all pupils and students; and
- provides PSHE, work-related education, and careers education and guidance in accordance with national guidelines.

98 An outstanding feature of the curriculum is the breadth of provision in the sixth form. In addition to a wide range of A level and vocational courses, students can gain accreditation in up to three key skills. A 'Key Issues' programme gives students opportunities to discuss current affairs and moral and environmental issues and also provides religious education, in accordance with statutory requirements.

99 Other good features of the curriculum are that:

- some pupils in Year 9 study a second foreign language;
- all pupils in key stage 3 take a course in drama; and
- almost all pupils in key stage 4 gain accreditation in information technology.

100 However, there are no vocational courses in key stage 4.

101 The school has gained the Basic Skills Quality Mark. Schemes of work and subject portfolios identify many opportunities for pupils to become more competent in communication, ICT and other key skills. Many pupils in key stage 3 gain a level 1 accreditation in communication. Departments have not made such good provision for pupils to improve their numerical skills. Last year, however, a small number of pupils in Year 9 gained accreditation in numeracy as part of a pilot scheme.

102 There is an outstanding range of extra-curricular activities, which broadens pupils' experiences and promotes their personal and social development. The activities involve a large number of pupils and students. There are opportunities to:

- represent the school in a wide range of sporting activities, (in which many pupils have gained county and national honours);
- take part in musical activities, school productions and Eisteddfodau;
- visit local and national theatres, galleries and businesses;
- undertake field studies; and
- travel overseas for educational and social purposes.

- 103 There is also other good provision to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Morning assemblies are often of outstanding quality and present moral messages very strongly. Every day starts with a 'thought for the day', pertinent to a moral or social issue. Throughout the day, the thought appears every few minutes on plasma screens, so that pupils are reminded of it. PSHE, religious education and some other lessons offer pupils the opportunity to explore other people's beliefs and values and to gain a greater awareness of the cultures of Wales, Europe and of countries across the world.
- 104 However, there are some shortcomings. Pupils in up to a third of the tutor groups we inspected do not have the opportunity to participate in a daily act of collective worship. Departments have not given enough thought to how they can give pupils opportunities to appreciate the spiritual aspects of their subject.
- 105 There are strong partnerships with parents, the local community, employers, and other educational providers, including initial teacher training colleges. The school has strong links with its family of primary schools. In the core subjects, pupils complete projects in Year 7 that they started in Year 6. Teachers regularly visit each other's schools.

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

- 106 There is good quality work-related education. Good features include:
- an effective partnership with *Careers Wales*;
 - a well-structured careers-guidance programme with many activities involving local employers;
 - an appropriate and effective work-experience programme that meets the needs and interests of most pupils and students; and
 - opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of enterprise and their entrepreneurial skills through the *Dynamo Project*, *Young Enterprise*, *Young Consumer* and *Young Engineer* competitions.
- 107 The school has a sound policy for the development of pupils' bilingual skills. An increasing number of pupils choose to follow 60 percent or 40 percent of the curriculum in key stage 3 through the medium of Welsh. The number of subjects that pupils can study through the medium of Welsh in key stage 4 and in the sixth form has also increased. All second language pupils follow the full GCSE Welsh course at key stage 4. Additional support in Welsh is available for newcomers to the area. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities that promote the development of bilingual skills. However, teachers who can speak Welsh differ widely in the amount of Welsh they speak in lessons, registration periods and around the school. Those who do not use Welsh very much limit pupils' opportunities to hear and use the language in everyday contexts and thus become more fully bilingual.
- 108 Y Cwricwlwm Cymreig has a firm place in schemes of work in all subjects.
- 109 The school has gained the International School Award and has received a large grant to promote key skills under the overall theme of 'sustainability'. The curriculum

appropriately promotes pupils' awareness of sustainable development and global citizenship. Good features include:

- the policy statements for sustainable development and the international dimension;
- aspects presented through the PSHE programme and in some departmental schemes of work;
- presentations in assemblies; and
- the work of the Eco-club.

110 Overall, the curriculum takes good account of the priorities of the Welsh Assembly Government. The range of experiences lays a secure foundation for pupils' lifelong learning.

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

Grade 1: Good with outstanding features

111 The grade we awarded agrees with the grade that managers awarded in their self-evaluation report.

The quality of care, support and guidance for learners

112 The care, support and guidance of pupils have many outstanding features. Managers have fostered a civilised and caring school community. The Home-School Contact Book provides a regular flow of information between parents and the school. Pupils, teachers and parents use the book extensively. There are excellent arrangements to help pupils from primary schools settle into school. Managers have also devised comprehensive assessment strategies that identify the learning needs of pupils entering Year 7, and ensure each pupil follows an appropriate curriculum.

113 Pupils and students choosing courses in key stage 4, the sixth form, or in further or higher education receive a wealth of information and advice. Strategies to improve pupils' attendance are having some success. There are also simple but highly effective strategies to monitor pupils' conduct, improve their behaviour and deal with pupils whose behaviour disrupts the learning of others.

114 There are many other good features. Managers have integrated pastoral and academic support so that the focus of all intervention is to help pupils achieve success in their school career. Close monitoring of pupils' behaviour and academic progress informs any intervention. Members of the school council take their responsibilities seriously. They have been influential in making changes, particularly in promoting a healthy school and improving the school environment. The school provides good careers education and guidance and good-quality work experience. Medical support is available through the nurse and teachers have taken part in First Aid training. Managers pay close attention to matters of health and safety and conduct thorough risk assessments. The child protection policy meets statutory requirements.

The quality of provision for additional learning needs

- 115 Provision for pupils with SEN matches the requirements of the SEN code of practice. The quality of this provision has several outstanding features. The SEN coordinator meets her counterpart in each primary school to discuss the needs of every pupil with SEN. This information, together with test results and detailed records of pupils' attainment, helps managers arrange appropriate support for each pupil. Managers maintain strong links with the parents or carers of each pupil. The SEN coordinator maintains an individual education plan (IEP) for each pupil and departments write plans appropriate to their own circumstances. Some of the plans in the core subjects include clear targets for the pupils and identify appropriate teaching strategies. The targets usefully guide the work of LSAs. Many teachers brief them well so that they can provide help when pupils need it, but not do things for them that they can do themselves.
- 116 There are also many good features. There are regular reviews of IEPs and assessments of pupils' progress towards meeting their targets. During lunchtimes, pupils can attend a reading and writing club or can continue the computerised learning program that they use in class once a fortnight. There is a 'social interaction' group that provides a supportive environment for pupils and a place where they can catch up with their work or do their homework. Pupils who have specific learning difficulties receive individual support and there are suitably adapted resources for visually impaired pupils. There are well-planned differentiated tasks and good support for SEN pupils in some mainstream classes. The school works closely with several agencies who provide specialised support for a number of pupils.
- 117 There are shortcomings, however, in a few aspects of the provision. Some foundation subject departments have not used IEPs effectively to show how they will respond to pupils' needs and they do not identify clear targets for the pupils. In some classes, teachers do not appropriately adapt the work for pupils with SEN.

The quality of provision for equal opportunities

- 118 The provision for equal opportunities has a number of outstanding features. The social climate in the school encourages all pupils to feel included and does much to ensure they are free from harassment or discrimination. Pupils who have disabilities play a full part in school life and have access to all parts of the building and grounds. There are many opportunities for pupils to study different cultures and a large number of library books explore issues of culture and social diversity. There is effective care for children in the care of a UA. Managers carry out the required regular reviews of their progress.
- 119 Good features include:
- a range of strategies to improve the attainment of different groups of pupils;
 - a clear anti-bullying policy supported by anti-bullying weeks, drama presentations and discussions during PSHE lessons; and
 - a curriculum that provides opportunities for pupils to learn about and discuss issues of racism and human rights.

Leadership and management

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

Grade2: Good features and no important shortcomings

120 The grade we awarded agrees with the grade that managers awarded in their self-evaluation report.

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

121 Since his appointment in 1992, the headteacher has maintained a clear vision of an excellent school, which he has pursued with vigour and determination. Under his leadership, the financial position of the school has been transformed, the popularity of the school has grown, the quality of the accommodation and of the learning resources has been greatly enhanced, the curriculum has broadened, the quality of teaching has improved and, in response to these changes, the standards that pupils achieve have risen substantially.

122 Senior managers share the vision of the headteacher and employ their own diverse talents to manage the school effectively. They provide strong leadership, and work effectively to bring about change and to turn their vision into reality. They have appropriate job descriptions and thoroughly understand their brief. They work with imagination and determination to challenge and support the members of staff responsible to them and to provide a high standard of education and care for pupils.

123 The quality of the work of middle managers is more variable. They understand the vision of senior managers, but some are more effective than others in planning and implementing strategies needed to make it a reality. Departmental documents are of good quality, but there are departments where practice does not fully match the policies. For each department, there is a curriculum leader, who is a member of the leadership team. The curriculum leaders monitor and support their departments well. Generally, the work of departments is of good quality. However, senior and middle managers still have much to do if the excellent provision in a few departments is to be copied consistently across the others.

124 Managers take full account of the priorities of the Welsh Assembly Government. We describe elsewhere in the report the effectiveness of their work in each area.

125 The school's use of data on pupils' performance has been a key element in raising standards. The data identify departments, groups of pupils and individual pupils who are performing at levels above or below what might reasonably be expected. Analyses of the data have helped the school recognise its strengths and direct its efforts to redress its shortcomings. On the basis of these analyses, managers set targets for departments and the whole school, and teachers set targets for pupils. The targets are demanding and realistic. Effective strategies to achieve the targets are leading to significant improvements in pupils' attainments and in almost every aspect of the school's work.

126 Managers regularly monitor the work of departments and teams of teachers. They address the shortcomings they identify. There are effective arrangements for performance management.

The extent to which governors meet their responsibilities

127 Governors play an effective role in managing the school and fulfil their statutory obligations, except in one matter (see Key Question 3). They are well informed on every aspect of the school through the reports they receive from the headteacher and through presentations that teachers make from time to time on their areas of responsibility. Governors have links with individual departments and a designated governor closely monitors the work with SEN pupils. Some of the governors have visited lessons and this has helped them understand the dynamics of the modern classroom and the challenges facing teachers. The governors have helped to set the school's aims and objectives and are involved in setting the annual targets for pupils' performance. They work with the headteacher and senior managers in setting the strategic plans that have led to many years of improvement in provision and standards. They closely monitor the budget and direct resources in support of the priorities in the school development plan.

128 The governors played a central role in compiling the school's self-evaluation report, appointing groups to look in detail at each section. They are aware of the standards that pupils are achieving in different subjects and aspects of their work.

129 The governors take pride in the work of senior managers, in their management of the budget and in the quality of the ICT equipment for use by managers, teachers and pupils. They keenly support improvements in areas that managers identify, such as the attainment of boys and the standard of pupils' written work in Welsh.

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

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

130 The grade we awarded agrees with the grade that managers awarded in their self-evaluation report.

How effectively the school's performance is monitored and evaluated

131 Senior managers have a thorough knowledge of every aspect of the school's provision and of the standards that pupils achieve. They share this information with the managers and teachers for whom they are responsible and rigorously plan and pursue strategies for improvement.

132 Managers have set up sound strategies for self-evaluation. They rigorously analyse data on pupils' attainment. Managers have also commissioned a survey of the views of pupils, teachers and parents and have taken action based on the analysis of its findings. Through the evaluation of their own areas of work, every member of staff contributes to the self-evaluation of the whole school.

- 133 The quality of self-evaluation by departments and other areas of the school is inconsistent. Assessments are generally accurate, but are not sharp enough in identifying shortcomings or their underlying causes. Evaluations therefore rarely include clear strategies to address these shortcomings.
- 134 The quality of the self-evaluation report that the school prepared for this inspection was outstanding. It is firmly rooted in first-hand evidence and presents a clear and accurate picture of the school. It is written in the format of an inspection report and makes unambiguous judgements that are very easy to understand.
- 135 Nearly all departments compiled self-assessment reports that were not of this quality. Their main shortcoming is that they do not start from a rigorous analysis of the standards that pupils are attaining. In writing the rest of the report, therefore, managers often do not make a firm link between aspects of their provision and the outcomes in terms of what pupils achieve.

The effectiveness of planning for improvement

- 136 The school development plan is of high quality. It has a small number of appropriate priorities whose realisation will significantly improve the school's provision and the standards that pupils achieve. The plan makes clear who will do what, how much it will cost and by when it will be done. Each year, managers monitor the progress they have made and, if necessary, modify the plan.
- 137 Managers acted quickly and effectively on the key issues in the last inspection report and achieved a large measure of success on each one. In just one aspect, this progress was too little. We deal with this matter in Key Question 3 of this report.
- 138 The work of managers has led to sustained and substantial improvements. In Key Question 1, we describe how key aspects of pupils' attainment have improved significantly faster in this school than they have, on average, throughout Wales.

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

Grade 1: Good with outstanding features

- 139 The grade we awarded agrees with the grade that managers awarded in their self-evaluation report.

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

- 140 The **staffing** of the school is good with outstanding features. There is a good balance between experienced and younger teachers. New and temporary members of staff receive clear information about the school and their responsibilities and very good support. Teachers are well qualified in the subjects they teach. Members of the administrative staff run the office, reception and reprographic areas efficiently. The administrative manager deals effectively with all financial matters and the site manager and caretakers ensure that the buildings remain in excellent condition. There are enough technicians and they support teachers well. LSAs receive good

training and guidance and work effectively. The librarian organises and supervises the use of the library efficiently.

141 The quality and quantity of **learning resources** in the six subjects we inspected are very good. The good and outstanding features include:

- a wide range of text books and equipment in departments;
- teachers' effective use of computer equipment to enhance their teaching;
- the high quality of materials that teachers and LSAs have prepared to support pupils' learning;
- the outstanding provision of ICT equipment throughout the school, which is very well used in many departments, including the vocational subjects;
- outstanding use of out-of-school resources to enrich the curriculum; and
- a wide range of visiting speakers.

142 Many departments use the library well, stimulating pupils to undertake independent work and research during lunchtimes and after school.

143 For sixth-form students, there is:

- a very good range of text books and equipment;
- a well stocked library; and
- a spacious study area, well equipped with computer equipment, which students use well for research and independent study.

144 The **accommodation** is good with outstanding features. The school manages use of the large and complex site outstandingly well. The buildings and grounds are well maintained, clean and free of litter. The accommodation is adequate for the number of pupils on roll. Its good features include:

- the adequate size of almost every room;
- the convenient close positioning of most rooms in each department;
- the stimulating and colourful displays of pupils' work and posters in corridors and classrooms; and
- the covered walkways between buildings.

145 Accommodation for the sixth form is outstanding. Students have a large common room, combined library and study facilities and a generous number of computer suites. There are very good facilities for research and independent study.

146 There are a few shortcomings in the accommodation. A few science lessons take place in classrooms rather than laboratories. Pupils in key stage 3 therefore miss some opportunities for practical work. In one area of the science department, teachers and technicians have to carry materials and equipment up and down a steep stone staircase.

How efficiently resources are managed to achieve value for money

147 Financial planning by senior managers and governors focuses sharply on curriculum needs and the priorities set out in development plans. The administrative manager, the headteacher and the governing body's finance committee manage the budget

well. The headteacher and the administrative manager monitor spending from day to day.

- 148 Managers take every opportunity to gain sponsorship and bid for grants. They allocate money to departments fairly and in support of development plans. The latest Audit report recognises the school's sound financial management. Managers have fully addressed the one minor concern that the report identifies.
- 149 The deployment of teachers and other members of staff allows them to use their time and expertise effectively. Performance management procedures work well. Teaching and non-teaching members of staff attend professional development courses in line with the priorities they identify and to support developments taking place in their departments. They evaluate each course and share what they have learnt with colleagues.
- 150 The school has implemented new job descriptions for teachers that focus sharply on teaching and learning. Teachers have time set aside for planning, preparation and assessment.
- 151 The school provides good value for money by:
- helping pupils and students to attain highly;
 - providing very good quality of teaching;
 - offering a good curriculum, and
 - providing very good care and support for all pupils and students.

Standards achieved in subjects and areas of learning

Welsh (first language)

Key Stage 3:	Grade 3	Good features outweigh shortcomings
Key Stage 4:	Grade 2	Good features and no important shortcomings
Sixth form:	Grade 3	Good features outweigh shortcomings

Good features

Key stages 3 and 4

- 152 Pupils make considerable progress in all language skills by the end of key stage 4.
- 153 Standards in speaking are good. Pupils in key stage 3 express opinions on moral issues using specialist vocabulary. They role-play enthusiastically in front of the class. They converse animatedly in pairs and groups. By key stage 4, group and class discussions are vibrant and pupils justify their viewpoints effectively.
- 154 Pupils' reading skills develop well. The majority of pupils read aloud confidently using appropriate intonation. They improve their standards by taking part in activities that promote reading for pleasure. Pupils collate information well from a range of sources and use it purposefully in their oral and written work.
- 155 Pupils' understanding of the use of language is good in both key stages. When analysing a story, a poem or a film, pupils explain metaphor and simile accurately. They select appropriate evidence to support their viewpoint. Pupils in key stage 4 empathise with the characters and describe feelings poignantly.
- 156 All pupils undertake a wide range of written tasks. They structure their work accurately. They vary their sentence structures well and use adjectives, comparisons and metaphors effectively. By the end of key stage 4 they write convincingly.
- 157 Pupils with SEN, well supported by their teachers and LSAs, make good progress in all language skills over the key stage.

Sixth form

- 158 Students in Year 12 are well motivated to work together to improve their standards.
- 159 Students understand different language registers and vary their register according to the situation. They use dialect to good effect when writing a script.
- 160 Students make measured comments on character and style and show respect for each other's views when comparing short stories of their choice.
- 161 In written work, students compare different viewpoints to present a balanced argument. The majority of students write in a mature style and use a wide range of vocabulary confidently.

Shortcomings

Key stage 3

- 162 A significant minority of pupils are reluctant to say more than a few words during class discussions.
- 163 A small number of pupils remain quiet during group discussions.
- 164 The writing of a significant minority of pupils is inaccurate in its syntax, grammar and spelling. Pupils do not act upon the detailed feedback from their teachers that gives them clear guidance on how to improve their work.

Key Stage 4

- 165 The difference in quality between spoken and written Welsh remains in the work of a significant minority. Pupils do not proof-read their work carefully to identify and correct spelling and mutation errors.

Sixth form

- 166 Students are too dependent on their teachers to correct repeated basic errors of grammar in their written work.
- 167 A significant minority of students are reluctant to take part in discussion on the more challenging set texts.

Mathematics

Key Stage 3:	Grade 2	Good features and no important shortcomings
Key Stage 4:	Grade 2	Good features and no important shortcomings
Sixth form:	Grade 2	Good features and no important shortcomings

Good features

Key Stage 3 and 4

- 168 Most pupils' oral answers are clear and accurate and use appropriate mathematical vocabulary.
- 169 All pupils can recall number facts quickly and higher-attaining pupils can process complex calculations mentally, especially during short lesson starter activities.
- 170 Pupils of all ages discuss mathematics with their peers to gain further understanding.
- 171 Pupils with SEN have a quick recall of number facts and can measure accurately.

Key Stage 3

- 172 Pupils can recall and understand concepts from previous lessons and apply them in a new context.
- 173 Higher-attaining pupils in Year 9 can apply statistics in real life situations and interpret the significance of their results.
- 174 Pupils revisit and understand concepts that they have previously misunderstood.
- 175 Pupils in Years 7 and 8 can recognise and create number patterns well.

Key Stage 4

- 176 Higher and average attaining pupils understand the equations of lines and can use them to reflect plane shapes. They are confident in using transformations.
- 177 Average-attaining pupils are able to use algebra confidently. They can square and find the square root of numbers mentally when applying Pythagoras' theorem.

Sixth form

- 178 Students have a good understanding of algebra (for example, creating and solving quadratic equations) and those in Year 12 are able to apply techniques and knowledge they gained in their GCSE course.
- 179 Students absorb new concepts and notation quickly.
- 180 Higher-attaining students are able to complete the mathematics A level course in one year to a very high standard and study further mathematics in Year 13.
- 181 Year 13 students have a good understanding of the course content in all areas.

Shortcomings

Key Stage 3

- 182 Pupils do not complete enough extended investigative tasks.
- 183 Some lower and average-attaining pupils do not complete enough work in class. Some of these pupils do not achieve as much as they might because they are attempting tasks that are too hard for them.

Key Stage 4

- 184 A minority of pupils do not complete enough work in class and do not ensure that it is correct or that they have understood it.
- 185 Pupils are not rigorous enough when using mathematical language, for example when describing transformations.

Sixth form

- 186 Some students in Year 12 are careless in their use of formulae, especially when substituting negative numbers.

Science

Key stage 3	Grade 3	Good features outweigh shortcomings
Key stage 4:	Grade 2	Good features and no important shortcomings
Sixth form:	Grade 2	Good features and no important shortcomings

Good features

Key Stage 3

- 187 Rather more than half the pupils have a secure knowledge and understanding of a wide range of topics.

- 188 Higher attaining and a minority of average attaining pupils use scientific terms accurately. Generally, they recall and apply concepts well to solve a range of problems.
- 189 A majority of pupils have a sound appreciation of the importance of healthy living, energy conservation and environmental issues.
- 190 Generally, pupils develop good practical skills, work safely and record appropriate measurements. A minority of pupils are able to analyse their results effectively.
- 191 In lessons specially designed to promote their thinking skills, pupils are able to explain the scientific principle they are investigating, and offer explanations of the behaviour they observe.
- 192 Pupils with SEN generally make good progress.

Key Stage 4

- 193 Pupils generally have a sound understanding of the more complex principles that they study.
- 194 The majority of pupils recall work well and apply their knowledge to understand some key scientific concepts in a range of problems.
- 195 Pupils develop a good understanding of the way that scientific developments have contributed to the development of industry, influenced the economy and had an influence on the environment.
- 196 Many pupils carry out investigations competently, work systematically and write good quality reports. Higher attaining and a significant number of average attaining pupils use their knowledge and understanding well to guide their planning.
- 197 Most pupils make systematic observations and measurements. Many of them understand how errors occur in experimental work and how they can be reduced.
- 198 A majority of pupils analyse their results in depth using appropriate graphs and numerical methods. They are able to comment sensibly on the validity of their findings. A minority of pupils evaluate their work in depth, critically discussing their procedures and suggesting ways to improve the investigation.

Sixth form

- 199 The majority of students make good progress, and a small number of the higher-attaining students make outstanding progress.
- 200 Students generally have a good understanding and ready recall of a wide range of concepts and principles.
- 201 The majority of students communicate their knowledge and understanding well and use scientific terms accurately in most explanations and practical reports.
- 202 Most students can evaluate data accurately, use the information to identify patterns of scientific behaviour and explain their predictions.

203 In practical work, particularly in biology and chemistry, the majority of students demonstrate a good understanding of the topic they are investigating, and carry out their work confidently, safely and systematically.

Shortcomings

Key Stage 3

204 A significant number of average and lower-attaining pupils have an insecure recall and understanding of current and previous work.

205 Some average and lower-attaining pupils are unsure of some scientific terms and how to apply scientific principles even in situations with which they are familiar.

206 A minority of pupils have difficulty assessing the validity of their experimental findings and drawing reasoned conclusions from them.

Key Stage 4

207 A minority of average and lower-attaining pupils do not have a secure understanding of several scientific concepts. Their recall of previous work is uncertain and this means that they have difficulty when they tackle scientific problems.

208 In reporting their investigative work, a number of pupils do not address the areas of planning, analysing and evaluating in sufficient depth.

Sixth form

209 A minority of students do not have a secure knowledge and understanding of the topics they are studying. As a result, they have difficulty applying some of the more complex principles to explain phenomena or solve problems.

Information technology

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

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

Sixth form: Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

Good features

Key Stage 3

210 In Year 7, most pupils can manage a computer well and can competently log on to the network. They locate programmes well using the desktop, understand computer windows and can competently handle icons, menus, pointers and functions.

211 Across Years 8 and 9, most pupils communicate information effectively using word processing, desktop publishing and presentation software.

212 Almost all of the pupils can readily find, select and use information obtained from electronic sources including the Internet, and use it well in their communications tasks.

213 Lower-attaining pupils and those with SEN make good progress, manage a computer well and gain an appropriate level of competence.

Key Stage 4

- 214 In the GCSE short course, most pupils readily and skilfully access the network, load and use a range of computer software with little help from their teachers. They have good practical computing skills and can confidently use computers and peripheral equipment well to carry out tasks.
- 215 The highest-attaining pupils have a good understanding of the theoretical aspects of their tasks and are able to explain and discuss their work using an appropriate level of technical vocabulary.
- 216 Almost every pupil can word-process documents with confidence and can combine text and images effectively in their communications projects. They show good skills in setting up a mail merge process using data from a prepared database.
- 217 Most pupils show good skills in using search tools to research topics on the Internet. They use their findings to good effect in their work and are sufficiently aware of their target audience.

Sixth form

- 218 In Year 12 GCSE courses, most students display a good level of computer skills, both in lessons and in their coursework.
- 219 In the AS computing course, the great majority of students speak confidently and with an appropriate level of technical accuracy about their work. They have a thorough knowledge of the specific advantages of various applications.
- 220 Almost all students show good skills in selecting and adapting appropriate techniques to solve problems. They discuss the concepts of the subject with good understanding and confidence.
- 221 Those students who continue with the A level computing course develop the work skilfully and with imagination. Students have a good understanding and knowledge of the theory relating to topics such as computer network systems and are prepared to explain and discuss a variety of topics.

Shortcomings

Key Stage 3

- 222 Pupils make too little use of the more complex formatting facilities of the software they use.
- 223 Although most pupils can create a basic database, they have too little knowledge and understanding of queries, sorting, and generating reports.

Key Stage 4

- 224 In coursework folios, pupils do not format the columns of spreadsheets efficiently. In lessons, pupils too rarely use short-cut keys to speed up some of the more basic tasks. Many pupils are not familiar with the more complex facilities in the software packages they use.
- 225 A small number of pupils are over-reliant on their teachers when they have to carry out new tasks. The level of competence of these pupils is too low.

Sixth form

- 226 A minority of students in the Key Skills course are over-reliant on their teachers and do not take sufficient responsibility for developing their projects.
- 227 In computing, a very small minority of students are over-reliant on their teachers. Their independent learning skills are one of the weaker elements of their work.
- 228 Students rarely emulate real applications in the outside world.

Art

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

Key Stage 4: Grade 1: Good with outstanding features

Sixth form: Grade 1: Good with outstanding features

Outstanding features

Key stage 4

- 229 Pupils successfully apply their knowledge of the visual language in exuberant, colourful work. They work in a wide variety of media and on different scales, both in two and three dimensions.
- 230 Pupils draw on their memory, feelings and imagination as a starting point for highly expressive artwork. They use and develop their observational skills in work that is often outstanding.

Sixth form

- 231 By the time they reach the sixth form, students are well equipped to function as highly competent independent learners. They show a mature commitment to their studies and produce work of a consistently high standard, much of it outstanding.
- 232 Students pursue their own interests and preoccupations thoughtfully, producing work that has a powerful impact on the viewer.

Good features

Key Stage 3

- 233 The great majority of pupils make good progress. They develop their understanding of a range of artists, past and present (including local and other Welsh artists) and of the different media in which they have worked.
- 234 These pupils show an understanding of the visual language of art, such as tone, colour, pattern, texture, shape and form. They begin to experiment appropriately with a range of techniques, both in two and three dimensions.
- 235 Pupils are able to record images effectively from direct observation.

Key Stage 4

- 236 Pupils build effectively on their previous learning, refining their skills, knowledge and understanding.

237 Pupils produce their own imaginative, personal responses to the work of artists from different periods and cultures.

Sixth form

238 Students confidently explore and experiment with a range of processes and techniques, developing the necessary control to achieve intended outcomes.

239 Students have well-developed critical skills, analysing and appraising their work as they go along and refining it accordingly.

Shortcomings

Key Stage 3

240 In a minority of cases, pupils do not work to the best of their ability. They lack the necessary motivation to concentrate on their task.

Music

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

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

Sixth form: Grade 1 Good with outstanding features

Outstanding features

Sixth form

241 Students are very able and experienced performers. They perform confidently and achieve high standards.

242 Many compositions display considerable imagination and originality as well as very good understanding of the medium and style they use.

Good features

Key Stage 3

243 Pupils sing with a pleasing tone, secure intonation and give suitable attention to musical detail and expression. They perform a variety of pieces, including their own compositions, confidently and with a good degree of accuracy on classroom instruments, keyboards and their own instruments. Most maintain secure ensemble when performing together.

244 Pupils compose in response to a variety of suitable stimuli. Many improvisations and melodic compositions have a good sense of shape and style and are melodically and rhythmically interesting.

245 Pupils have a good awareness of musical elements and can, when appraising, identify basic features in recorded extracts. A few make perceptive comments when evaluating their own practical work.

246 Pupils with SEN are aware of the elements of music and can identify aspects of each one in the pieces they listen to. Most of them can create well-shaped melodic figures.

Key Stage 4

247 Pupils make good progress in vocal and instrumental performance. Many perform with confidence and achieve good standards.

248 Much of the work in progress in composing shows imaginative treatment of ideas in a variety of idioms that reflect pupils' personal interests. Many compositions have a good sense of style and structure and are enhanced by effective use of ICT.

249 Higher-attaining pupils discern features well when appraising music from different styles and periods.

Sixth form

250 Students are acquiring good knowledge and understanding of the music they are studying. Their aural skills are developing well.

Shortcomings

Key Stage 3

251 A few pupils are sometimes insecure in group performance.

252 Some compositions are not sufficiently adventurous or musically interesting. In general, pupils do not do enough to explore different sounds and combine them imaginatively in group compositions. Their ability to evaluate their own practical work and that of others is not sufficiently developed in some classes.

Key Stage 4

253 A few pupils do not adequately develop their compositions.

254 The appraising skills of certain average and lower-attaining pupils are uneven. They are good in certain tasks but insecure in others.

Sixth form

255 In general, the appraising skills of the students are not as secure as their practical skills.

School's response to the inspection

The headteacher, staff and governors take pride in the inspection report's description of the school as "having many good and several outstanding features". It is also pleasing to note the inspectors' view that the school sets demanding targets as part of a continual process for improving standards.

Our self-evaluation report, which reflects detailed monitoring of school life, has been described as an "outstanding document". The process by which this has been compiled is now entrenched in the school's cycle of review, and as a result, we are confident that evaluation at all levels of the school will in future reflect the quality and standard of this document.

It is also pleasing to note comments made about the school's use of data. The management team's view is that the availability of data is of little benefit unless it is utilised to raise standards. The school has worked hard to evaluate performance, identify issues and allocate resources from patterns that data provides. This has all been geared towards raising standards, as has been acknowledged.

The exceptional commitment of staff in delivering the curriculum and in offering a wide range of extra-curricular activities ensures that pupils gain a broad and balanced educational experience throughout their time at school. Comments in the report reflect this and we appreciate the inspections team's rigour in ensuring that all aspects of school life in the community and elsewhere have been recognised.

The school's continued improvements in standards have been as a result of the long-term vision set out by the headteacher. The report recognises this and comments on the excellent behaviour and courtesy displayed by pupils, reflecting the positive ethos that allows them to learn effectively. We are delighted to note that improvement rates for results at key stages 3 and 4, and in particular the excellent achievements in the sixth form, have been recognised in the report.

As a naturally bilingual school, we are delighted that the report highlights the Welsh ethos and the effectiveness of the school in providing for and promoting bilingualism. We are proud to note the recognition given to the school's outstanding provision of care, guidance and support of pupils.

We would like to acknowledge the professional co-operative and unobtrusive way in which the inspection team carried out their work. The report allows the school to reflect on the many achievements of the last six years and to focus on the challenges ahead which managers have already identified.

Appendix 1

Basic information about the school

Name of school	Amman Valley School
School type	Secondary
Age-range of pupils	11-18
Address of school	Margaret Street Ammanford Carmarthenshire
Postcode	SA18 2NW
Telephone number	01269 592441

Headteacher	Mr R O P Jones OBE
Date of appointment	1992
Chair of governors/ Appropriate authority	Councillor J Potter
Reporting inspector	Ian Garth Higginbotham
Dates of inspection	6-10 November, 2006

Appendix 2

School data and indicators

Year group	Y 7	Y 8	Y 9	Y 10	Y 11	Y 12	Y13	Total
Number of pupils	249	256	287	308	273	191	100	1664

Total number of teachers			
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time equivalent (fte)
Number of teachers	99	4	101.7

Staffing information	
Pupil: teacher (fte) ratio (excluding special classes)	16.4
Average teaching group size - key stage 3 and 4	22.8
- sixth form	14.1
Overall contact ratio	0.8

Percentage attendance for three complete terms prior to the inspection								
	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13	Whole School
Summer 2006	91.9	93.2	89.5	98.2	97.7	98.4	97.2	94.7
Spring 2006	88.4	88.4	86.9	89.3	89.0	91.2	90.5	88.8
Autumn 2006	92.6	92	89.5	90.5	89.4	91.7	90.6	90.8

Percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals	16.0
Number of pupils temporarily excluded during 12 months prior to inspection	13

Appendix 3

National Curriculum Assessment Results End of Key Stage 3:

National Curriculum Assessment KS3 results: 2006														
Total number of pupils in Y9: 307														
Percentage of pupils at each level (Teacher assessment)														
		D	A	F	W	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	EP
English	School	0	0	0	0	0	1	7	17	51	20	4	0	0
	National	0	0	1	0	0	2	8	21	35	24	8	0	0
Welsh	School	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	22	47	23	5	0	0
	National	0	0	1	0	0	1	4	19	35	30	10	0	0
Mathematics	School	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	24	31	29	8	0	0
	National	0	0	1	0	0	1	6	18	24	32	15	0	0
Science	School	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	21	46	19	8	0	0
	National	0	0	1	0	0	0	6	19	33	27	12	0	0

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

Percentage of pupils attaining at least level 5 in mathematics, science and either English or Welsh (first language)			
by Teacher Assessment		by Test	
In the school	59.2	In the school	
In Wales	58.3	In Wales	

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 2006	276
Average GCSE or GNVQ points score per pupil	43

The percentage of 15 year old pupils who in 2006:	School	UA	Wales
entered for 5 or more GCSEs or equivalent	88	88	88
attained at least 5 GCSE grades A* to C, the equivalent vocational qualifications or a combination of both	58	57	53
attained at least 5 GCSE grades A* to G, the equivalent vocational qualifications or a combination of both	87	87	86
attained GCSE grades A*-C in each of mathematics, science, English or Welsh first language (the core subject indicator)	46	43	39
entered at least one Entry level qualification, GCSE short course or GCSE	97	96	97
attained one or more GCSE grades A*-C or the vocational qualification equivalent	82	80	76
attained one or more GCSE grades A*-G or the vocational qualification equivalent	96	94	93
attained no graded GCSE or the vocational qualification equivalent	4	5	4
attained one or more Entry level qualification only	0	2	3
attained a GNVQ Part 1, a GNVQ at Foundation level or NVQ level 1	0		
attained a GNVQ Part 1, a GNVQ at Intermediate level or NVQ level 2	0		

For students aged 16, 17 and 18, results in A/AS, GNVQs and NVQs	
Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 in January 2006	285
Number of students entered for 2 or more GCE A level examinations or equivalent in 2006	103
Number of students entered for fewer than 2 GCE A levels or equivalent in 2006	18

Report by Ian Garth Higginbotham
Amman Valley School, 06/11/06

	School	UA	Wales
Percentage of students entered who achieved 2 or more grades A-C	78	75	68
Percentage of students entered who achieved 2 or more grades A-E	97	97	94
Average points score per candidate entering 2 or more subjects	20	21	20
Number of students who achieved a GNVQ Intermediate or NVQ at level 2	2		
Number of students who achieved a GNVQ Advanced or NVQ at level 3	2		

UA Unitary Authority

Appendix 4

Evidence base of the inspection

Fifteen inspectors (including the school's nominee) spent the equivalent of 54 days in the school.

We observed 162 lessons, including 89 in the six subjects we inspected.

We attended five year-group assemblies and 22 registration periods.

We scrutinised the written work of a small cross-section of pupils from each year group. We also inspected pupils' work during lesson observations.

We held formal discussions with groups of pupils and students from each year group. We also spoke to pupils informally.

The registered inspector and a colleague met the governing body before the inspection week and reported the main findings to them after the inspection.

Before the inspection, the registered inspector and a colleague met members of the staff.

Twenty parents attended the meeting with the registered inspector before the inspection. We received 139 replies to our questionnaire. A few parents also wrote to the registered inspector.

Six local businesses wrote to tell us about their partnership with the school.

Before, during and after the inspection, we scrutinised a wide range of documents about the school, including the school's self-evaluation report and data on pupils' key-stage test and examination results.

Appendix 5

Composition and responsibilities of the inspection team

Team member	Responsibilities
Ian Garth Higginbotham Registered Inspector	Key Questions 1, 2, 5 & 6
Dylan Jones Lay Inspector	Contributions to Key Questions 1, 3, 4, & 5
Glyn Davies	Core Team Key Question 3 Contributions to Key Questions 1 & 2 Sixth-form issues Science
Glyn Griffiths	Core Team Key Question 4 Contributions to Key Questions 1 & 3
Mary Crandon	Core Team Contributions to Key Questions 1, 2 & 3 Welsh
Anne Newman	Core Team Key Question 7
Gwyn Jones	Contributions to Key Question 1 Mathematics
Meiriol Meredith Jones	Contributions to Key Question 1 Lessons across the curriculum
David Michael Jones	Science
Alan Wynne Jones	Music
Rhodri Jones	Lessons across the curriculum
Nerys Wynn Cossey	Lessons across the curriculum
Gillian Figg	Art
Keith Hopkins	Contributions to Key Question 1 Information Technology
Siôn Watkins	Nominee

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Technology House
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Acknowledgement

We wish to express our sincere thanks to the headteacher, governors, staff and pupils of Amman Valley School for their cooperation with us at all stages of the inspection.