Inspection under Section 163 of the Education Act 2002

A report on the quality of education in

Branas School
Llandrillo
Corwen LL21 0TA

School number: 663 6040

Date of inspection: 10–12 June 2008

by Estyn, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

Date of publication: 5 August 2008
The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:

- nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities (LAs);
- primary schools;
- secondary schools;
- special schools;
- pupil referral units;
- independent schools;
- further education;
- adult community-based learning;
- youth support services;
- youth and community work training;
- LAs;
- teacher education and training;
- work-based learning;
- careers companies;
- offender learning; and
- the education, guidance and training elements of the Department for Work and Pensions funded training programmes.

Estyn also:

- provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others; and
- makes public good practice based on inspection evidence.

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Copies of this report have been provided to the school for members of staff. A copy of the summary report is sent to every family with a child at the school. The school is not required to provide copies of the full report to parents or members of the public but may do so on request. Also, on request, the school must make arrangements for parents to have access to the full report.
Introduction

Branas School was inspected as part of a national programme for the inspection of independent schools under section 163 of the Education Act 2002. The main purpose of inspection under this section is to report on compliance with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003. In schools that provide non-maintained nursery education, this report also satisfies the requirements of Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

In addition, inspection reports identify good features and shortcomings, so that a school may improve the quality of education it offers and raise the standards its pupils achieve. The inspection of all independent schools within a six-year cycle is also designed to give parents information about the performance of their child’s school.

The inspection of Branas School took place between 10 June 2008 and 12 June 2008. A team of inspectors from Estyn, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate for Training and Education in Wales, undertook the inspection. Estyn is a statutory body independent of, but funded by, the National Assembly for Wales.

The team made its judgements having considered 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 report is written in accordance with Estyn’s Common Inspection Framework (which is available at www.estyn.gov.uk).

Estyn’s reports follow its guidance for the writing and editing of reports, which is available on the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.uk). The table below shows the terms that Estyn uses and a broad idea of their meaning. The table is for guidance only.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Terms</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nearly all</td>
<td>with very few exceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most</td>
<td>90% or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many</td>
<td>70% or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A majority</td>
<td>over 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half/around half</td>
<td>close to 50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A minority</td>
<td>below 40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few</td>
<td>below 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very few</td>
<td>less than 10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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
Year groups and key stages

Independent schools use a variety of systems for numbering year groups. This report, however, uses 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 and parents.

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Ages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y1</td>
<td>5-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y2</td>
<td>6-7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Y3</td>
<td>7-8</td>
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<td>Y4</td>
<td>8-9</td>
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<td>Y5</td>
<td>9-10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Y6</td>
<td>10-11</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Secondary phase:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Ages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Y7</td>
<td>11-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y8</td>
<td>12-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y9</td>
<td>13-14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Y10</td>
<td>14-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y11</td>
<td>15-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y12</td>
<td>16-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y13</td>
<td>17-18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 |

Although independent schools are not required to follow the National Curriculum, we use these terms for convenience.
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
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</tr>
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<td>4 Evidence base of the inspection</td>
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<td>5 Composition and responsibilities of the inspection team</td>
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</table>
Context

The nature of the provider

1 Branas School is registered with the Welsh Assembly Government as an independent day school that provides education for boys aged 11 to 16. The school is approved for the admission of pupils with statements of special educational need (SEN) who have social, emotional, behavioural and moderate learning difficulties.

2 The school is owned and managed by Branas Isaf Personal Development Centre (PDC) Ltd, which is an organisation that provides residential care, education and therapy services for looked-after children and young people.

3 All pupils are looked-after children and live in children’s homes managed by Branas Isaf PDC. The children’s homes are all registered with the Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales.

4 There are eight boys aged 11 to 16 on the school roll.

5 Seven boys have statements of special educational needs (SEN) for social, emotional and behavioural needs (SEBD). One boy also has moderate learning difficulties (MLD).

6 Local authorities and health authorities pay the fees for all pupils. Pupils come from Wales, England and Northern Ireland.

7 All pupils are from homes that are English-speaking. Lessons are in English and the school does not aim to make pupils bilingual in English and Welsh.

8 Estyn has conducted annual monitoring inspections of Branas School during the period 2002 to 2007. This is the school’s first full inspection.

The school’s priorities and targets

9 The school aims to enable pupils to:

- enjoy learning and come to see education as a lifelong process;

- develop the attitudes, understanding and skills necessary, now and in the future, to exercise independence and initiative and to work, participate and thrive in a democratic society;

- develop lively, enquiring minds and the ability to find and use information, to question and debate rationally and to apply understanding and skills in order to address issues, solve problems and carry out practical tasks;

- develop personal values and gain understanding of the values and the ways of life of other people and other cultures;
• understand the world in which they live and the interdependence of individuals, groups and nations;
• develop appreciation and concern for the environment; and
• be able to work co-operatively with others.

10 The development plan for the school contains objectives to:

• develop schemes of work and increase opportunities for pupils to achieve accreditation;
• review and improve assessment and planning;
• further enhance educational resources;
• develop the use of progress files and improve links with Careers Wales and work experience providers; and
• further broaden and enrich the curriculum and enhance learning opportunities.
Summary

11 Branas School meets all but one of the regulatory requirements necessary to comply with the Independent School Standards Regulations 2003.

Tables of grades awarded

12 The inspection team judged the school’s work as follows:

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

Standards of achievement

13 Overall, pupils' standards of achievement in the lessons inspected are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 1</th>
<th>Grade 2</th>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
<th>Grade 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>58%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14 These standards of achievement are well above the targets set by the Welsh Assembly Government for 2007 for maintained schools, that 65% of classes should be grade 2 or better. Standards of achievement also exceed the target set by the Welsh Assembly Government for 2010 for maintained schools, that 98% of classes should achieve grade 3 or better.
The grades awarded in the subjects inspected are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inspection area</th>
<th>Key stage 3</th>
<th>Key stage 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information technology</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic and creative education</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15 The standard of pupils’ work exceeds that normally achieved by looked-after children in similar settings and is well beyond what might be predicted from their level of attainment when they arrive at the school. Pupils in key stage 4 gain good qualifications, including Entry Level and GCSE.

16 Standards of achievement are always good and often outstanding. Where standards are outstanding, pupils:

- have excellent motivation and enthusiasm for learning, are fully engaged in lessons and consistently well behaved;
- are knowledgeable about the subject matter and ask very good questions to extend their own learning;
- make rapid progress in literacy and numeracy;
- develop excellent personal, social and learning skills; and
- achieve high levels of attendance and punctuality.

17 Pupils across the school achieve very good standards of behaviour and develop very good personal and social skills. Their improved behaviour prepares them well for further education or employment. Many pupils move on to attend colleges or find a job.

18 Standards of attendance and punctuality are outstanding in relation to pupils’ prior achievement.

19 Pupils who arrive with poor basic skills make outstanding progress in literacy and numeracy and apply these new skills very well in everyday life.

20 In all subjects, pupils make good progress in developing the key skills of communication, numeracy, information and communications technology (ICT) and working with others. Pupils develop creative and thinking skills well.

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1 The inspection team did not award grades for subjects as there were only two pupils in key stage 3.
The quality of education and training

21 The quality of teaching is always good and often outstanding. All teachers set high expectations for work and behaviour and they make sure that pupils have good access to a range of appropriate accreditation. Teachers explain very clearly to pupils, both orally and in marking, exactly what they have to do to improve their performance.

22 Teachers, care staff and pupils get on very well with each other. They work in partnership to create a school in which pupils feel safe, behave well and are eager to learn.

23 In lessons awarded a grade 1 for teaching, the most common outstanding features include:

- work set at a high level to motivate and challenge pupils and to widen their horizons;
- very good use of questioning to challenge pupils and to extend their understanding;
- excellent use of careful and thorough planning that takes good account of individual pupils’ needs and interests;
- very good use of high quality tailor-made resources; and
- very good management of behaviour, keeping pupils fully engaged in the lessons by setting a range of short tasks designed to hold pupils’ interests.

24 The school provides pupils with an appropriate and varied range of learning activities that meet their needs very well. The outstanding features of the school’s provision are:

- the wide range of very well-planned out-of-hours and off-site learning activities;
- the effective partnership working with local schools and colleges;
- the very well-organised and high quality work experience placements; and
- the school’s contribution to meeting the Welsh Assembly Government’s agenda for social inclusion and lifelong learning.

25 There are many good features in the school’s work to support and care for pupils. As a result, vulnerable pupils, including those with additional learning needs, make very good educational progress and overcome significant disadvantages in their lives.

26 Despite this generally positive picture, care, support and guidance could be further strengthened by providing all pupils with access to a structured programme of personal, social and health education, and by improving the arrangements for promoting equality of opportunity across the curriculum.
Leadership and management

27 The school is very effective in meeting the aims and values of the key national priorities for vulnerable children and young people. The many outstanding features in achievement, teaching and provision in the school provide clear evidence of the highly effective leadership and management.

28 The outstanding features of leadership and management are:

- the consistently high expectations for the work of the school, that are based on clear and appropriate aims and values that lead to outstanding outcomes for pupils;
- the quality and impact of team work within the school and the wider organisation; and
- the quality of partnership working with other providers of education and training.

29 The headteacher works very closely with other leaders and managers in the organisation to provide very clear direction for the school. Leaders and managers, including subject leaders, have high expectations for pupils' educational achievement and for the quality of provision. The well co-ordinated work of the teaching, care and therapy staff has a very positive impact on pupils' attitudes, behaviour and learning outcomes.

30 Leaders and managers have gained the trust and confidence of a wide range of partners in the local community, enabling pupils to take part in a wide range of mainstream learning and leisure activities.

31 The school is particularly strong in monitoring and evaluating performance. The outstanding features of the work to evaluate and improve quality and standards include:

- leaders and managers have a detailed and accurate understanding of strengths and areas for improvement that is based on first-hand evidence of the quality of teaching and learning; and
- the very positive impact of improvement planning on pupils’ standards and the quality of education over the last five years.

32 The school has enough well-qualified and experienced teachers and deploys them appropriately. However, there is no formal induction programme for new teachers, and not enough access to training for teachers to continue to develop their professional knowledge and skills.

33 The school has a good range of suitable learning materials for the subjects and areas of the curriculum that it offers, and makes effective use of these resources. There are some minor shortcomings in the resources for literacy and ICT.

34 The school buildings and grounds provide an attractive and appropriate setting for teaching and learning.

35 Overall, the school makes efficient use of resources and provides value for money.
### Compliance with the regulations for registration

#### The quality of education provided by the school

36 The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

#### The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

37 The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

#### Welfare, health and safety of pupils

38 The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

#### The suitability of proprietors and staff

39 The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

#### Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

40 The school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

41 Although the school meets almost all of the regulatory requirements for this standard, in order to comply fully with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination (Wales) Regulations 2003 by planning to improve access for disabled people to the school [5(v)].

#### The provision of information

42 The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

#### The manner in which complaints are to be handled

43 The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.
**Recommendations**

44 In order to improve the school further, the staff and the proprietors need to:

R1 comply fully with the regulations for registration;

R2 provide a structured programme of personal, social and health education for all pupils;

R3 improve the arrangements for promoting equality of opportunity across the curriculum;

R4 provide school staff with a structured induction programme and opportunities for continuing professional development; and

R5 further improve the provision of learning resources for literacy and ICT.

45 Since the inspection report notes that the school does not meet one of the standards required for registration, the National Assembly for Wales will require the proprietor to submit an action plan within a specified period of time. This plan must set out the steps that the school will take to meet the standard, and the timescale within which it will complete each step.

46 Estyn advises the proprietor to amend its current development plan to show what action the school intends to take in response to the recommendations. It is also advisable to circulate this plan, or a summary of it, to all parents at the school.
Standards

Key Question 1: How well do learners achieve?

Grade 1: Good with outstanding features

47 In its self-evaluation report, the school awarded this key question a grade 2. The inspection team awarded a higher grade because the school had not fully recognised the outstanding features in pupils' achievement.

48 Overall, pupils' standards of achievement in the lessons inspected are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 1</th>
<th>Grade 2</th>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
<th>Grade 5</th>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

49 These standards of achievement are well above the targets set by the Welsh Assembly Government for 2007 for maintained schools, that 65% of classes should be grade 2 or better. Standards of achievement also exceed the target set by the Welsh Assembly Government for 2010 for maintained schools, that 98% of classes should achieve grade 3 or better.

50 The grades awarded for standards in the subjects inspected appear in the earlier summary section of the report. The inspection team did not award grades for individual subjects in key stage 3 because there were only two pupils in this key stage at the time of the inspection. The overall judgement for standards of achievement takes account of the work of all pupils.

51 It is not appropriate to compare the levels of pupils' attainment with local and national averages, since the school caters for a very small number of pupils whose ability and prior educational attainment differs from year to year.

52 The standard of pupils' work exceeds that normally achieved by looked-after children in similar settings and is well beyond what might be predicted from their level of attainment when they arrive at the school.

53 Standards of achievement are always good and often outstanding. In relation to their prior knowledge and skills, pupils achieve very good standards in English, science, music and art. Achievement is consistently good in mathematics, information technology (IT) and history. Pupils in key stage 4 gain good qualifications, including Entry Level and GCSE.

54 Where standards are outstanding, pupils:

- have excellent motivation and enthusiasm for learning, are fully engaged in lessons and consistently well behaved;

- are knowledgeable about the subject matter and ask very good questions to extend their own learning;

- make rapid progress in literacy and numeracy;
• develop excellent personal, social and learning skills; and

• achieve high levels of attendance and punctuality.

55 Pupils behave very well, often for the first time in a school setting. They are very keen to talk about the significant progress they make. They learn to manage their behaviour well and concentrate on their school work. For many, this progress is outstanding. Their improved behaviour prepares them well for further education or employment. Many pupils move on to attend colleges or find a job.

56 Standards of attendance and punctuality are outstanding in relation to pupils’ prior achievement. In their previous schools, pupils have not attended regularly and have often been excluded from school. In this school, the average attendance for the last 3 terms is just over 91%, closely matching the all-Wales figure for mainstream secondary schools for 2006-2007 of 90.6%, and well above the figure for special schools in Wales of 86.1%. This very good attendance and punctuality gives pupils the time in school that they need to catch up on their school work and improve their literacy and numeracy skills.

57 Pupils develop excellent personal, social and learning skills, often from a very low baseline. Many pupils arrive at the school lacking confidence in their ability to behave well, concentrate on their school work, work well with others and achieve success in school. These pupils make very good progress in learning to listen carefully to the teachers and to complete challenging tasks.

58 Pupils who arrive with poor basic skills make outstanding progress in literacy and numeracy and apply these new skills very well in everyday life. Pupils quickly begin to tackle the particular skills that will improve their chances of securing college places or jobs, for example by improving their handwriting, developing strategies for adding up accurately and learning to read unfamiliar words. These pupils are very proud of the clear progress they make.

59 In all subjects, pupils make good progress in developing the key skills of communication, numeracy and information and communications technology (ICT).

60 Standards of achievement in the wider key skills are good. Pupils learn to organise their thinking, make choices and apply an investigative approach to their learning. They develop very good social skills and improve their ability to work well with others, for example in activities that include kayaking, climbing and playing rugby for a local team. Pupils develop new interests, such as fishing, bird watching and gardening, that they can continue to enjoy when they return to their communities.
The quality of education and training

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

Grade 1: Good with outstanding features

61 In its self-evaluation report, the school awarded this key question a grade 2. The inspection team awarded a higher grade because the school had not fully acknowledged the outstanding features in the quality of teaching.

62 The quality of teaching was judged as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 1</th>
<th>Grade 2</th>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
<th>Grade 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

63 The percentage of lessons in which the quality of teaching is grade 2 or better is above the proportion of lessons graded 2 or better in independent schools inspected in 2006-2007.

64 The quality of teaching is always good and often outstanding. All teachers set high expectations for work and behaviour and they make sure that pupils have good access to a range of appropriate accreditation. Teachers know their subjects well, and communicate their knowledge enthusiastically to pupils. They give pupils very clear explanations, both orally and in their marking, to tell them exactly what they have to do to improve their performance.

65 All teachers manage their classes very well. Teachers, care staff and pupils get on very well with each other. They work in partnership to create a school in which pupils feel safe, behave well and are eager to learn. Teachers make very good use of praise to motivate pupils and are quick to discourage any inappropriate behaviour.

66 In lessons awarded a grade 1 for teaching, the most common outstanding features include:

- work set at a high level to motivate and challenge pupils and to widen their horizons;
- very good use of questioning to challenge pupils and to extend their understanding;
- excellent use of careful and thorough planning that takes good account of individual pupils’ needs and interests;
- very good use of high quality tailor-made resources; and
- very good management of behaviour, keeping pupils fully engaged in the lessons by setting a range of short tasks designed to hold pupils’ interests.

67 All teachers pay very good attention to widening pupils’ horizons. In English, pupils are introduced to classic literature such as Shakespeare, Tennyson and Dickens. In
science, pupils engage in complex and fast-paced discussions about issues such as global warming. Teachers organise excellent opportunities for pupils to work with visiting experts, for example in biology, history, art and music.

68 There are very effective procedures for the initial and ongoing assessment of pupils’ learning and behavioural needs. Teachers use these assessments very well to write good quality individual education plans and to set work that is well matched to pupils’ abilities, needs and interests. Teachers’ planning takes good account of risk assessments and information from the therapists.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 1: Good with outstanding features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

69 In its self-evaluation report, the school awarded this key question a grade 2. The inspection team awarded a higher grade because the school had not fully acknowledged the outstanding features of its provision.

70 The outstanding features of the school’s provision are:

- the wide range of very well-planned out-of-hours and off-site learning activities;
- the effective partnership working with local schools and colleges;
- the very well-organised and high quality work experience placements; and
- the school’s contribution to meeting the Welsh Assembly Government’s agenda for social inclusion and lifelong learning.

71 The curriculum is broad and balanced, and covers all areas of learning that are required by the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations. Schemes of work for all subjects are well planned and cover a wide range of interesting topics. All pupils are offered opportunities to achieve accredited awards and qualifications, including Entry Level in English, mathematics, science, art, physical education and information technology (IT) and GCSE in English, mathematics and science. Pupils also benefit from a broad range of learning activities in history, geography and music.

72 There is good provision for pupils to develop key skills in preparation for moving on from school and for independent living. The regular use of individual laptop computers enables pupils to improve the organisation and presentation of their work and to become more independent learners.

73 The school enables pupils to develop good creative and problem-solving skills, through delivery of a structured thinking skills programme, in individual therapeutic work and in subjects such as art, history and IT.

74 There is good provision for pupils to develop personal and social skills, including moral awareness. The regular, well-planned opportunities for pupils to work together in pairs and small groups, both in school and at home, enable pupils to develop good skills in working with each other and with adults.
Subjects such as English, history, geography and science enable pupils to develop their understanding of the local community, of other cultures and of important global issues, including sustainable development.

The curriculum is very effectively enriched by the provision of a wide range of out-of-hours learning activities, such as fishing, hill walking, climbing, abseiling and kayaking. These activities provide pupils with an excellent range of experiences that help to develop their self-confidence and important social skills.

The partnership working between the school, Careers Wales, employers and other providers of education and training, including several colleges of further education, is highly effective. This is an outstanding feature of the school’s provision that greatly enhances the opportunities available to pupils and improves their prospects of continuing their education and training when they leave the school.

The school makes well-planned and very well-supported arrangements for pupils to pursue their particular learning and career goals in local mainstream settings. The exceptionally good links with a local independent school and with several colleges of further education in North Wales and Shropshire enable pupils to experience courses that are highly relevant to their needs and interests. These experiences encourage pupils to work hard in school to gain the qualifications that they need for their chosen career, for example in plumbing, and enable them to move on successfully to further education or training on leaving school.

The school works closely with Careers Wales and with a range of local employers to make outstanding provision for work-related education. The school successfully negotiates arrangements for work experience placements that very closely match pupils’ needs and aspirations, for example in catering, sports or agricultural work. These placements inspire pupils to achieve the qualifications they need to pursue courses and jobs in these areas.

The school makes an outstanding contribution to meeting the Welsh Assembly Government’s agenda for social inclusion and lifelong learning by providing highly vulnerable pupils with an excellent range of learning opportunities that enable them to overcome significant barriers to learning and to develop important skills for adult life.

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

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

In its self-evaluation report, the school awarded this key question a grade 2. The findings of the inspection match the judgement made by the school.

There are many good features in the school’s work to support and care for pupils. As a result, pupils make very good educational progress and overcome significant disadvantages in their lives.

Teachers work very closely with residential care staff and with therapists to plan, deliver and review support programmes that are very effective in helping pupils to improve their attendance at school and to re-engage with learning. This good teamwork has a very positive impact on pupils’ behaviour and self-confidence as learners, helps new pupils settle quickly into school and greatly improves pupils’ chances of success in their lives beyond school.
The school has an appropriate policy for personal and social education, and gives pupils good support and guidance with issues that arise from their individual personal and social circumstances. Teachers help pupils to address difficult personal issues that impact on their wellbeing and learning. All pupils have access to regular therapy sessions, including music therapy, that help them to understand and manage the impact of emotions such as anger and distress on their behaviour. The school makes good use of local services, including Denbighshire Youth Service and North Wales Police, to provide pupils with information about aspects of health and wellbeing, including sexual health and substance abuse.

There are appropriate policies and arrangements that contribute to the wellbeing of all pupils, including first aid, behaviour management and child protection.

Attendance registers are completed appropriately, and the school gives pupils very effective support for attendance and punctuality.

The school has coherent and effective arrangements for assessing pupils’ emotional and behavioural needs and for managing any risks that may arise from pupils’ behaviour. The policy for managing challenging behaviour is detailed and effective, and includes appropriate procedures for the recording of physical interventions, behavioural incidents and sanctions should the need arise. As a result of the high quality of support for pupils, the school has not needed to make any entries into this record in the last two years.

There are appropriate policies and procedures for preventing bullying and for addressing pupils’ concerns and complaints. Pupils clearly understand these procedures and are confident that any issues would be dealt with promptly and effectively.

The school has effective procedures for identifying and meeting pupils’ additional learning needs. Pupils have appropriate individual education plans (IEPs) that are produced and regularly reviewed by the team of teachers, therapists and care staff. The school liaises closely with placing authorities and parents, including corporate parents, providing them with detailed and helpful reports for annual review and transition plan meetings.

The school provides very good support for pupils who have moderate and specific learning difficulties. Pupils with literacy difficulties receive very effective individual support from teachers and care staff. The provision of laptops for all pupils is of particular benefit to those who experience difficulties with literacy, numeracy and presentation of their work. The effective use of the Instrumental Enrichment programme provides pupils with specific learning needs with good support to improve their thinking skills.

The school promotes pupils’ understanding and respect for equality and diversity in its day-to-day work and in aspects of the curriculum, including English, art and music.
Despite the overall very positive picture, there are areas for improvement in the school’s care, guidance and support. These are that:

- pupils do not have access to a fully-structured programme of personal, social and health education to ensure that they all have opportunities to discuss and reflect on issues such as healthy eating, smoking and alcohol; and

- the school does not have a policy for promoting equality of opportunity or provide enough opportunities for pupils to consider the impact of gender, disability and racial equality on their lives.
Leadership and management

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

Grade 1: Good with outstanding features

93 In its self-evaluation report, the school awarded this key question a grade 2. The inspection team awarded a higher grade because the school had not fully acknowledged the outstanding features of leadership and strategic management.

94 The school is very effective in meeting the aims and values of the key priorities for vulnerable children and young people, for example in the ‘Rights to Action’ agenda in Wales and the ‘Every Child Matters’ agenda in England. The many outstanding features in achievement, teaching and provision in the school provide clear evidence of the highly effective leadership and management.

95 The outstanding features of leadership and management are:

- the consistently high expectations for the work of the school, that are based on clear and appropriate aims and values and that lead to outstanding outcomes for pupils;
- the quality and impact of team work within the school and the wider organisation; and
- the quality of partnership working with other providers of education and training.

96 The headteacher works very closely with other leaders and managers in the organisation to provide very clear direction for the school. The chief executive, headteacher and other managers have high expectations for pupils’ educational achievement. The headteacher sets consistently high standards for teaching and provides teachers with very good ongoing support and guidance, both informally and through the formal appraisal process, that enables them to become more and more effective in meeting pupils’ needs.

97 Leadership and management of subjects and curriculum areas is good. Subject leaders work closely with other teachers to review and improve provision for the subject and to ensure that the school meets the requirements of external examination bodies.

98 The well co-ordinated work of the teaching, care and therapy staff has a very positive impact on pupils’ attitudes, behaviour and learning outcomes. Members of staff have clear roles and responsibilities and work very well together as a team. The headteacher works closely and effectively with leaders and managers of care and therapy to set clear expectations for all staff who contribute to the work of the school. The role of care staff in classrooms is well understood and is appropriate to pupils’ needs. The therapy staff provide teachers with appropriate support in planning learning activities for individual pupils.
99 The day-to-day running of the school is efficient and effective. The daily routines are clear, well planned and effectively communicated to staff and pupils. As a result, the school has a calm and purposeful atmosphere.

100 The school has succeeded in gaining the trust and confidence of a wide range of partners in the local community. The headteacher establishes very good communication between the school and local colleges, employers and community groups, and ensures that support arrangements for individual pupils are appropriate and flexible enough to meet the needs of these external partners. As a result, pupils have many very good opportunities to take part in mainstream learning and leisure activities, including local college courses, work experience and activities such as Cadets.

101 There are appropriate arrangements for the board of directors of Branas Isaf PDC, including the proprietor, to oversee the strategic direction and quality of provision in the school. The board sets the overall context and budget for the school’s work within the organisation and monitors its work by receiving regular reports from the chief executive, headteacher and other senior managers.

102 The chief executive and headteacher, working as directed by the board, have effectively ensured that the school meets almost all the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations.

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

Grade 1: Good with outstanding features

103 In its self-evaluation report, the school awarded this key question a grade 2. The inspection team awarded a higher grade because the school had not fully acknowledged the outstanding features of its work to improve quality and standards.

104 The school is particularly strong in monitoring and evaluating performance. The outstanding features of the school’s work include:

- that leaders and managers have a detailed and accurate understanding of strengths and areas for improvement that is based on first-hand evidence of the quality of teaching and learning; and

- the very positive impact of improvement planning on pupils’ standards and the quality of education over the last five years.

105 The self-evaluation report provided for the inspection identifies the many good features of the school’s performance and, appropriately, does not highlight any important shortcomings. In five of the seven key questions, inspectors awarded a higher grade than the school. This is because, when awarding grades, the school had not fully acknowledged the many outstanding features of its work.

106 The school has responded very well to the recommendations of successive annual monitoring inspections since 2003. Overall, the school has made outstanding progress in improving pupils’ standards of achievement and the overall quality of
provision over the past five years. Leaders and managers, working closely as a team with other members of staff, have transformed the school by systematic use of effective procedures for monitoring, evaluating and improving teaching and learning.

107 The chief executive, headteacher and teachers know the school very well. The headteacher monitors all aspects of teaching and learning, by checking teachers’ planning and pupils’ work and through a regular programme of observing lessons. Teachers regularly analyse data on pupils’ achievements to inform the process of target setting for pupils and for the school. The regular staff meetings enable all teachers to contribute to monitoring, evaluation and improvement planning.

108 The school development plan identifies clear, costed priorities for improvement for the next three years. This plan is of good quality, and includes appropriate details of the actions, responsible persons, expected outcomes and monitoring arrangements for each priority.

109 The school is well informed about the views of pupils, parents and other key partners. The arrangements for pupils, parents and placing authorities to provide the school with feedback and suggestions for improvement are informal, but nonetheless effective. Almost all pupils make their views known in the course of day-to-day activities as well as on more structured occasions, such as individual meetings with teachers and care staff. The school seeks and takes account of the views of parents and placing authorities through review meetings, and has regular dialogue with its partners in the local community.

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

Grade 2: Good features and no important shortcomings

110 In its self-evaluation report, the school awarded this key question a grade 2. The findings of the inspection match the judgement made by the school.

111 The school is well staffed to provide teaching in very small classes. Teachers are well qualified in their subjects and are experienced in working with vulnerable pupils. The school makes very good use of additional staff and visitors with expertise in, for example, art, music, outdoor education and animal welfare, to provide variety and enrichment in pupils’ learning.

112 The school has a good range of suitable learning materials for the subjects and areas of the curriculum that it offers, and makes effective use of these resources. Classrooms are well equipped with computers, television and video equipment, and contain interesting collections of objects to illustrate current topics.

113 The school library contains an appropriate variety of literature and reference books. In addition, teachers have created ‘skills boxes’ containing a good range of educational games to help pupils to develop thinking skills and the ability to work together.

114 There are good resources for ICT, including well-supervised access to the internet in classrooms and the provision of laptop computers, without internet access for safety reasons, for each pupil.
115 The school makes good use of local facilities to enhance its learning resources. Pupils experience a good range of interesting educational visits, for example to the Tate Modern in Liverpool and to Theatr Clwyd in Mold.

116 The school buildings and grounds provide an appropriate setting for teaching and learning. The classrooms and specialist rooms, such as the art room and library, are of a good standard, and are well maintained. There are attractive displays of work throughout the school that celebrate pupils’ achievements. The school grounds provide pupils with a very attractive environment for outdoor leisure and learning activities.

117 There are strong and effective procedures for ensuring that the school uses its resources efficiently and for controlling the school’s budget. The chief executive and the headteacher ensure that decisions on spending are securely based on the organisation’s aims, values and business priorities, and on the school development plan. The headteacher monitors the budget carefully, and provides regular reports for the quarterly meetings of the board of directors of Branas Isaf PDC.

118 Despite this overall positive picture, there are a few areas where resources could be further improved, including that:

- the lack of a digital projector limits pupils’ and teachers’ opportunities to use ICT to enhance learning;

- the school does not provide pupils with access to items such as magazines, newspapers and CD-ROMs; and

- there is no formal induction programme for new teachers, and not enough access to ongoing training to develop professional skills, for example in ICT.

119 Overall, the school makes efficient use of its resources and provides value for money.
Standards achieved in subjects and areas of learning

English

Key stage 4: Grade 1 – Good with outstanding features

Outstanding features

120 Many pupils who enter the school with poor literacy skills make outstanding progress. These pupils:
- learn and remember strategies to help them improve their reading;
- increase their vocabulary; and
- make excellent progress with their writing skills.

121 More able pupils:
- make very good progress in writing for a range of audiences;
- produce extended pieces of creative writing that is of high quality;
- respond well to classic texts such as Shakespeare, poetry from the 1914-18 World War, Dickens and Greek myths and legends; and
- organise their coursework files very well.

Good features

122 Pupils of all levels of ability:
- read aloud confidently;
- improve their speaking and listening skills well; and
- make very good use of IT to draft and redraft their written work.

123 Pupils who are moving on to college apply their literacy skills very well when practicing the completion of application forms, reading the college prospectus and attending interviews.

Mathematics

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

Good features

124 All pupils:
- show good understanding of a broad range of mathematical concepts and techniques, including number, shape, space, data and algebra;
• make good progress in acquiring the knowledge and skills required to achieve qualifications, including Entry Level and GCSE, at levels appropriate to their ability;

• develop good skills in solving challenging mathematical problems;

• use mathematical language appropriately to explain the methods that they are using in their work; and

• are proud of their achievements in mathematics.

### Science

**Key stage 4: Grade 1 – Good with outstanding features**

**Outstanding features**

125 All pupils:

- make very good progress in acquiring the knowledge and skills required to achieve external qualifications in science that are appropriate to their age and ability;

- are very keen to extend their understanding of scientific concepts and processes in biology, physics and chemistry by asking interesting and relevant questions;

- keep very well-presented records of their work; and

- develop very good literacy, numeracy, ICT and problem-solving skills through the work they do in science.

**Good features**

126 All pupils:

- use complex scientific vocabulary appropriately in oral work and in their writing; and

- develop good observational skills through practical and investigative work in science.

### Information technology

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

**Good features**

127 Pupils make good progress towards achieving the Entry Level award in information technology (IT).

128 Pupils make good progress in learning to use IT for a range of purposes that include:

- designing posters to advertise activities and places of interest;
• using graphics to present findings from surveys; and

• making regular use of personal laptops to draft and redraft their written work.

129 More able pupils understand how to use different fonts, import graphics, use a spellchecker, edit documents, use spreadsheets and prepare PowerPoint presentations.

130 Pupils develop key skills well through the work they do in IT. This includes:

• making good use of past examination papers to help to improve the standard of their work in IT;

• presenting and organising their IT coursework files well; and

• using IT skills effectively to complete coursework in subjects such as English, mathematics and science.

131 Pupils have a good understanding of the risks associated with using the internet.

**Aesthetic and creative education**

**Key stage 4: Grade 1 – Good with outstanding features**

**Outstanding features**

132 All pupils:

• make very effective use of a wide range of artistic techniques;

• develop very good skills in ceramics work, including experimenting with a variety of textures and slips; and

• improve their aesthetic appreciation and practical skills by working with visiting artists and by visiting local galleries.

133 Many pupils:

• produce a high standard of screen printing work; and

• develop a more mature style of work as they experiment with pastel and watercolours.

134 All pupils make very good progress in their musical knowledge, skills and understanding and quickly learn to:

• understand and use musical language appropriately;

• read music and recognise how written music relates to the notes played on keyboards; and

• recognise and play simple chords and arpeggios.
135 Individual pupils listen very carefully to favourite pieces of music and recreate them on the keyboard.

**Good features**

136 In music, pupils:

- play instruments competently and rhythmically; and
- develop good listening skills.
School's response to the inspection

We are delighted with the outcome and judgements made by Estyn following the school’s first inspection. We have all worked very hard to achieve consistently high standards and thereby enable our students to achieve their optimum potential. Everyone associated with Ysgol Branas is therefore thrilled and heartened by the judgements made in response to all seven key questions.

Use of the word ‘outstanding’ is quite humbling and the fact that it is used frequently gives everyone at Branas a shared sense of pride.

Excellent motivation and a thirst for learning are part of our ethos, particularly with youngsters who arrive with poor basic skills and then go on to make outstanding progress. We welcome the team’s comments in respect of this key area.

The quality of teaching underpins the learning that takes place and this is rightly recognised as being of a consistently high quality. Estyn’s recognition of this as a strength is most encouraging. Differentiated learning that challenges and extends the individual is fundamental to our work and reflects the investment we all make in order to achieve the very best.

The outstanding features of leadership and management are highlighted. The way we work as a collaborative team has been recognised by Estyn who comment upon consistently high expectation with outstanding outcomes. Our team has gained the trust and confidence of a wide range of partners, performance is monitored and evaluated and the process of self improvement becomes part of an on-going cycle. The inspectors’ supportive comments are greatly valued.

The five recommendations will be incorporated in the school’s development work scheduled for 2008/2009 and enable us to move forward in these areas.

Our school has responded very well to the recommendations of successive annual monitoring inspections since 2003. Overall the school has made outstanding progress in improving pupils’ standards of achievement and the overall quality of provision over the past five years. Estyn’s acknowledgement of this is especially pleasing.

Branas School has indeed been transformed by the use of systematic and effective procedures for monitoring, evaluating and improving the teaching and learning.

The task ahead is to build upon systems already in place and further enhance the levels of provision for those youngsters who are placed in our care, confident that today Ysgol Branas offers quality provision.
## Appendix 1

### Basic information about the school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of school</th>
<th>Branas School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School type</td>
<td>Independent Special</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age-range of pupils</td>
<td>11 to 16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Address of school | Llandrillo
Corwen
Denbighshire |
| Postcode          | LL21 0TA                              |
| Telephone number  | 01490 440545                          |
| Headteacher       | Mr Geoff Corfield                     |
| Date of appointment | September 2003                       |
| Proprietor        | Mrs Claire Murphy                    |
| Lead inspector    | Mrs Sue Willan                       |
| Dates of inspection | 10 – 12 June 2008                    |
## Appendix 2

### School data and indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year group</th>
<th>Y7</th>
<th>Y8</th>
<th>Y9</th>
<th>Y10</th>
<th>Y11</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of pupils</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full-time</th>
<th>Part-time</th>
<th>Full-time equivalent (fte)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of teachers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
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### Staffing information

<p>| | | | |</p>
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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupil: teacher (fte) ratio (excluding special classes)</td>
<td>2:1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil: adult (fte) ratio in special classes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average teaching group size</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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### Percentage attendance for three complete terms prior to the inspection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Y6</th>
<th>Y7</th>
<th>Y8</th>
<th>Y9</th>
<th>Y10</th>
<th>Y11</th>
<th>Y12</th>
<th>Whole school</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Term 1 (Spring 2008)</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>91</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term 2 (Autumn 2007)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term 3 (Summer 2007)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>83</td>
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### Number of pupils excluded during 12 months prior to inspection

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Number of pupils excluded during 12 months prior to inspection</td>
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### National Curriculum assessment results

#### End of key stage 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Curriculum Assessment KS3 Results 2007</th>
<th>Number of pupils in Y9</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There were no pupils eligible for assessment at the end of key stage 3 in 2007.</td>
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#### Public examination results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For pupils aged 15, results in GCSE, Entry Level Qualification, GNVQ and NVQ</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of pupils aged 15 on the school roll in January 2007</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As the number of pupils aged 15 was fewer than 5, summary information is not included.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4

Evidence base of the inspection

Four inspectors, including a peer assessor, spent a total of 12 inspector days at the school, and met as a team before the inspection.

These inspectors visited 12 lessons or part lessons in school, and had discussions with:

- the headteacher and teachers;
- managers of the residential care provision and of the therapy team;
- the chief executive for Branas Isaf Personal Development Centre;
- a representative of a local college; and
- pupils.

The team also considered:

- pupils’ behaviour during break periods, at lunchtime and at the beginning and end of the school day;
- a wide range of pupils’ work in all subjects;
- documents provided by the school, including the school’s self evaluation report;
- inspection reports provided by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales;
- three responses from parents and corporate parents to the parents’ and carers’ questionnaire; and
- four letters from external partners.
## Appendix 5

### Composition and responsibilities of the inspection team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team member</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sue Willan HMI</td>
<td>Reporting inspector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Key Questions 5, 6 and 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire Yardley HMI</td>
<td>Key Questions 1 and 2</td>
</tr>
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<td>English</td>
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<td>Information technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alison Wilkinson AI</td>
<td>Key Questions 3 and 4</td>
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<td>Mathematics</td>
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<td>Aesthetic and creative education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lisa Kovacs</td>
<td>Peer assessor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contributions to Key Questions 4 and 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Scudamore AI</td>
<td>Registration Standard 5</td>
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### Acknowledgement

The inspectors express their sincere thanks to the headteacher, chief executive, staff, and pupils of Branas School for their help and courtesy throughout the inspection.