



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**Cardiff High School
Llandennis Road
Cyncoed
CF23 6WG**

Date of inspection: March 2019

by

**Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education
and Training in Wales**

About Cardiff High School

Cardiff High School is an English-medium 11 to 18 mixed comprehensive school situated in the north of the city of Cardiff. There are 1,613 pupils on roll, of which 422 are in the sixth form. At the time of the last inspection in March 2013, there were 1,496 pupils on roll, including 373 in the sixth form. Most pupils come from the surrounding residential areas of Cyncoed, Lakeside and Roath.

Around 6% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is much lower than the national average of 16.4%. The school has a diverse pupil intake. The majority of pupils speak English as their first language. Four hundred and thirty-five pupils are categorised as pupils with English as an additional language and around 36% of pupils come from a minority ethnic background. One per cent of pupils speak Welsh as their first language.

The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is around 18%, which is lower than the national average of 22.9%. The percentage of pupils with a statement of special educational needs (2.4%) is just above the national average of 2.2%. The school has a specialist resource base serving the local authority for 15 pupils with specific learning difficulties.

The school is currently a pioneer school and is working with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward developments relating to education reform in Wales.

The headteacher has been in post since 2011. The senior leadership team consists of two deputy headteachers, four assistant headteachers and the school business manager. All except two of the senior leaders were in post at the time of the last inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website at the link below.
<http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/Schools/SchoolSearch?lang=en>

Summary

Cardiff High School is an exceptional school. Pupils' achievements have been amongst the highest in Wales over recent years, and yet the school has striven relentlessly to improve in every aspect of its work. In particular, the school has focused on refining its approaches to supporting all teachers to hone their craft. This has resulted in highly engaging teaching, confidently and imaginatively delivered, and rooted in a strong understanding of subject knowledge and learning.

Pupils respond extremely positively to the inspirational teaching and high levels of challenge. In particular, they develop their abilities to think creatively and to recall and transfer their knowledge, understanding and skills to a wide range of learning contexts. As a result, pupils' outcomes are well above expectations. High quality teaching, care, support and guidance combine effectively to enable pupils to become confident, capable and ambitious learners.

Leadership is outstanding. It is distributed widely and effectively and all know their part in developing the school. Leaders emphasise and promote the importance of wellbeing for staff and pupils. As a result, pupils enjoy school and staff morale is high.

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	Excellent
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Excellent
Teaching and learning experiences	Excellent
Care, support and guidance	Excellent
Leadership and management	Excellent

Recommendations

There are no recommendations following this inspection.

What happens next?

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on its work in relation to sustaining excellence for dissemination on Estyn's website. The school will draw up an action plan that shows how it is going to maintain high standards and quality of provision.

Main findings

Standards: Excellent

Pupils' outcomes have been well above expectations over time. Most pupils recall previous knowledge securely, embrace new ideas enthusiastically and consolidate their learning particularly well. They are well-motivated, demonstrate a very high level of interest and engagement in their work, and respond positively to challenge. As a result, they make strong progress in building their skills, knowledge and understanding.

An outstanding aspect of pupils' standards is in the way that they develop their thinking skills across the curriculum. Many pupils become increasingly adept in analysis, evaluation, creative thinking and problem-solving in a wide range of contexts. This enables them to make creative connections, challenge themselves and deepen their learning. As a result, many pupils have curious and inquiring minds.

Nearly all pupils listen attentively and many respond eagerly to their teachers' questions. Many make well-considered contributions to class discussion, for instance in physical education when explaining how to retain momentum in each phase of the triple jump. Many pupils articulate their ideas clearly and confidently, for example when justifying their choices of media to depict environmental issues in their artwork. Many pupils use a wide range of vocabulary. They become increasingly sophisticated in their use and understanding of subject-specific terminology as they progress through the school. A minority of pupils ask particularly perceptive questions of their peers and teachers. This helps them to develop their critical skills particularly successfully.

Most pupils read well and locate key information efficiently. Many draw inferences and make deductions thoughtfully from a wide variety of texts using a broad range of strategies. A majority of pupils synthesise evidence competently from different sources to build their understanding successfully. For example, Year 8 pupils analyse a variety of media reports to produce a well-researched news bulletin based on current issues, such as the funding crisis in the NHS.

Many pupils develop an assured understanding of literary techniques and key stylistic features of writing, which they apply successfully to their own work in a wide variety of literary forms and genres. For example, they use their knowledge of symbolism, personification and alliteration in Gothic novels successfully to inform their creative writing. Many pupils write with accuracy, using a rich vocabulary, for example when writing skilful descriptions of their cookery dishes using pertinent words to describe taste and texture. Many produce well-structured pieces of extended writing in a wide range of contexts. Most pupils edit, redraft and refine their work intelligently to make improvements to their writing. They transfer their learning in English to other subjects confidently so that they write successfully across the curriculum.

Many pupils make strong progress in their numeracy skills. They apply these skills successfully in a range of contexts, enabling them to tackle a variety of problems, discover new information and extend their understanding in different subjects. For

instance, in design technology, pupils in Year 7 investigate data relating to human proportions by collecting their peers' hand measurements to inform the design of their products. Most pupils use their number skills deftly, for example when calculating the energy loss in the National Grid. They draw graphs using suitable axes and accurate scales and deduce relevant conclusions from their findings. Many pupils at key stage 4 can interpret, analyse and synthesise information from a range of graphs skilfully, for example in business studies when they examine sales figures and make deductions about the life cycle of a product.

Nearly all pupils routinely use the school's virtual learning environment, which enables them to develop their Information Communication Technology (ICT) skills well through collaboration with their peers and teachers. Many pupils practise, apply and develop these competently across most subjects. They are confident in creating multi-media presentations using a range of software packages. Many pupils use data-bases and spreadsheets competently. Nearly all pupils search efficiently for information on the internet, evaluating the reliability of sources and making accurate references to these in their work.

Most pupils make very strong progress in their Welsh language skills. They read confidently and speak with accurate pronunciation and increased fluency as they progress through the key stages. They write extended pieces using a wide range of vocabulary and a variety of tenses well. In 2018, most pupils achieved a level 2 qualification in Welsh, with a high proportion achieving A*-A grades.

In the sixth form, most pupils deepen and extend their subject knowledge successfully. They express their ideas with increasing maturity using refined technical vocabulary, for example when analysing signs, symbols and language in the media. Many pupils demonstrate well-developed analytical skills and tackle a broad range of real-life problems with confidence. For example, when applying theories of probability to information about medical research.

At key stage 4, pupils' performance has been outstandingly strong in recent years. In all indicators, pupils' performance has been notably above expectations. All groups of pupils make strong progress. The performance of boys and girls, and pupils eligible for free school meals compare very well to that of their counterparts in similar schools. At the end of Year 11, almost all pupils remain in full time education either in the school or a further education college.

Pupils in the sixth form achieve very well. The proportion of pupils achieving three A*-A grades and pupils' average wider points score all compare favourably with the outcomes of pupils in similar schools.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Excellent

Pupils in Cardiff High School develop their wellbeing and resilience exceptionally well. Most are determined, enthusiastic and confident learners, eager to play a full part in the life and work of the school and the community.

Most pupils have extremely positive attitudes to learning. They take an enthusiastic part in lessons and are ambitious learners. Most are able to work independently for sustained periods, set themselves high standards and relish new experiences and

tasks. Many pupils display particularly high levels of perseverance in their learning, especially when they are engaged in challenging activities, for example, in drama, when using contemporary approaches to devising theatre using abstract movement. Most pupils work well together in pairs and groups, listening carefully to the ideas of others as well as expressing their own views clearly and coherently. For example, in PE when pupils lead their peers through warm-up activities.

Pupils thrive in the calm, caring and supportive ethos that permeates the school community and most feel safe and happy in school. They are confident that staff will resolve any difficulties effectively and know whom to approach if they have any concerns. Nearly all pupils behave exceptionally well in class and around the school. They are extremely polite and courteous to others. There are high levels of trust and mutual respect between pupils, staff and other adults.

Many pupils are involved in a range of diverse activities in the school and in the wider community. A particularly strong feature is the involvement of pupils in decision-making processes. The school parliament contributes valuably to the life and work of the school. For example, its members participate in observations of learning and teaching both in Cardiff High and in other schools and make useful and pertinent suggestions for improvement. Pupil focus groups are instrumental in shaping the curriculum and influencing teaching approaches to enhance their learning. They have influenced practice, such as changing the nature of feedback to pupils in certain subjects.

Most pupils understand the importance of healthy eating and the need to exercise regularly to stay fit. Participation rates in the extensive extra-curricular programmes, which include a wide range of cultural, sporting and academic activities, are very high and enrich the experiences of pupils. Through these activities, pupils develop their social, leadership and life skills effectively. This results in high levels of self-confidence among pupils. They apply these attributes successfully in a wide range of contexts such as acting as prefects, peer mentors for younger pupils and participating in local conservation projects through the work of the eco-club. In addition, 'digital leaders' develop a wide range of skills effectively by training pupils, teachers and other adults to develop their proficiency in ICT. Pupils involved in the charity committee benefit greatly from creating strong community links with charitable organisations. In the Philosophy Café, a club that enables pupils to explore the beliefs and lives of others, they engage with contemporary issues and challenge their own views and preconceptions.

Levels of attendance are very strong. The attendance of all groups of pupils is notably above that of the same groups in similar schools.

Teaching and learning experiences: Excellent

Together with the highly responsive curriculum and exceptional provision for progressive skill development, teaching makes a highly significant contribution to the outstanding standards achieved by pupils. The consistently high quality of teaching across the school is an exceptional feature. It is sustained and enhanced by the rich and vibrant culture of professional learning.

Nearly all teachers create welcoming and positive learning environments. They establish helpful routines and set extremely high expectations for performance and participation which are tailored to the specific needs of the pupils and the subject. These teachers also use detailed information about their pupils' prior attainment to determine precisely the knowledge, skills and understanding to be developed. As a result they pinpoint the exact level of challenge required to close the gap between potential and performance for all groups of pupils.

A highly effective feature of teaching is the engaging content that nearly all teachers plan for their lessons. They draw successfully upon their comprehensive subject knowledge and enthusiasm for their curriculum area to place their lessons in context expertly. For example in science lessons, teachers use prose from a local author and images of Cardiff as a 'coal city' imaginatively to frame a lesson on the formation and use of this energy source. Planning by most teachers also includes beneficial opportunities to develop pupils' skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT in the most apposite way.

As a result of the school's extensive professional learning opportunities, nearly all teachers in the school demonstrate flexibility and flair in their practice. They combine the school's lesson planning and reflection tools and techniques with the most fitting approaches to learning and teaching in their subject. Notably, most sixth form lessons also demonstrate the highly effective teaching seen across the rest of the school.

Most teachers' explanations and instructions are clear, engaging and illuminating, and stress the use of specific subject terminology. For example, in Welsh lessons, teachers explain idioms to pupils and how these translate literally and metaphorically. In most subjects teachers model expectations well, for instance when sharing worthwhile examples from pupils in the class to exemplify effective literary techniques when studying 'A Woman in Black'.

In the most effective lessons, pace is carefully orchestrated to match the task. The level of challenge unfolds through carefully sequenced activities, which build on each other purposefully. This enables nearly all pupils to make exceptional progress. For example, in mathematics, when developing problem solving skills, teachers use engaging prompts to revisit relevant prior learning before moving on to analyse the distribution of a range of data through box and whisker plots.

Questioning is a significant strength of the school. Most teachers' questioning is highly effective, and many teachers probe to elicit full and developed responses, prompting pupils for more detail if necessary.

Assessment is used effectively to bring about improvement in pupils' work. Most departmental policies reflect the whole school expectations. In each department, teachers adapt these well to include the most fitting and effective methods of feedback for their subject. Peer and self-assessment are also used to good effect against specific success criteria in many subjects. For example, pupils are taught to undertake valuable reflections on the communication and manufacturing skills they develop when reimagining phone covers in design technology. Verbal feedback in lessons is predominately timely and helpful. Most teachers provide beneficial diagnostic and constructive written comments. As a result, many pupils act promptly on feedback and improve their work.

The curriculum is carefully crafted to provide extremely valuable and enjoyable learning experiences for all pupils. Innovative curriculum design is finely tuned to provide depth and breadth to pupil learning experiences. For example, teachers have adopted a 'mastery' approach in maths and French to encourage deeper levels of learning for all pupils. This fosters high levels of pupil engagement in lessons and contributes exceptionally to positive attitudes to learning.

At key stage 4 there is a well-considered and wide range of valuable academic and vocational options. In response to pupil feedback, the Welsh Baccalaureate qualification has been adapted creatively to allow pupils at key stage 4 a wider choice of options. The school also provides a tailored set of worthwhile qualifications for targeted groups of vulnerable pupils through their 'Q+' skills based provision. A very few pupils follow beneficially bespoke vocational learning pathways through valuable partnerships with a local college. These ensure that their individual needs are met comprehensively.

Learning experiences are planned with care to allow pupils to build systematically on their knowledge and understanding as they move through the school. This ensures that pupils move seamlessly to their next stage of learning. For example, strong links and collaborative work with partner primary schools in science develop pupils' skills effectively. The provision for more able pupils is planned skilfully and effectively so that it is responsive to the needs of individuals in different subjects. For example, in mathematics at key stage 4, more able pupils follow the additional mathematics qualification, and at key stage 5, pupils benefit from bespoke sessions for university entrance examinations.

All pupils benefit from extensive opportunities to engage in worthwhile learning experiences beyond the classroom which extend and deepen their subject knowledge and understanding. These include science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) activities which are provided in partnership with local higher education institutions and employers.

Highly effective provision for skills contributes to outstanding pupil outcomes. Detailed planning for progression in pupils' skills ensures regular opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy, numeracy, and ICT skills. These are woven into purposeful contexts across subject areas. The school is integrating the Digital Competence Framework effectively across the curriculum.

The school plans carefully for groups of pupils who require support with their literacy and numeracy so that staff deliver interventions effectively within lessons. In this way, pupils continue to learn alongside their peers while developing greater confidence and proficiency in their skills in context, across the curriculum.

The school provides a wide variety of valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of Welsh heritage and culture. A particularly strong feature is the involvement and consistent success of pupils in the Welsh learners' competitions at the Urdd National Eisteddfod. The school shows a strong commitment to developing the Welsh language and it is celebrated visibly around the school.

The school is using its strong practice in learning and teaching and thoughtful curriculum planning to develop innovative approaches to curriculum reform. For

instance, at key stage 4, pupils studying expressive arts subjects have jointly prepared and staged a performance piece based on the theme of Protest and Welsh heritage. Pupils worked collaboratively in order to produce the script, scenery and music and their work culminated in a public performance at the National Museum of Wales.

Care, support and guidance: Excellent

The school is successful in creating an inclusive, caring and aspirational ethos. A culture of high expectations, respect and tolerance pervades all aspects of the school's work. This contributes significantly to pupils' outstanding levels of wellbeing, their personal development and the consistently high standards that they achieve.

There are comprehensive and robust processes to track and monitor pupils' progress and wellbeing throughout each key stage. Staff use this information to identify each individual pupil's specific needs and any barriers to their learning particularly well. This enables leaders to respond swiftly and to implement personalised interventions. This is a very strong feature of the school.

Written reports to parents provide valuable and comprehensive information about their child's current attainment, progress and attitudes to learning. These reports include subject-specific targets that are useful in helping pupils to improve their work. There are well-planned transition processes at each key stage that result in pupils settling quickly into the next stage of their education and making good progress.

Provision for pupils with additional learning needs is a particularly strong feature. The school is proactive in identifying individual pupils' needs through effective transition meetings with partner primary schools and the meticulous use of baseline assessment information. Staff use this information well to inform lesson planning. Individual educational plans are well structured. They contain helpful measurable targets and carefully considered strategies that help teachers to provide valuable support to pupils with additional learning needs. The school-based educational psychologist, behaviour, emotional and social difficulties specialist and the autistic spectrum disorder consultant provide swift and effective in-house intervention. This effective provision contributes extremely well to the excellent outcomes that these pupils achieve. The school's specialist resource base for pupils with specific learning difficulties provides high quality care and support to pupils from across the Cardiff area.

There is extensive and highly effective individualised support for vulnerable pupils. Access to programmes to develop social and emotional skills, the nurture centre and the imaginative use of therapeutic animal assisted activities, where pupils interact with a 'therapy dog' to relieve anxiety enable these pupils to thrive, and develop their self-confidence and self-esteem. This is a particular strength of the school.

The school has very strong procedures for maintaining excellent levels of attendance. These include careful monitoring, close links with parents and celebrating success. The well-established 'discipline with dignity' ethos, supported by restorative approaches helps to promote respect for all. This has resulted in exemplary standards of behaviour across the school, fostering pupils' self-discipline and sense of responsibility highly successfully.

There is a comprehensive and well-focused personal and social education programme across all key stages. It provides valuable opportunities to reflect on personal values, to challenge prejudice and develop empathy towards others. This makes a very strong contribution to pupil's spiritual, moral and cultural development and enhances their social skills well. This provision is supported effectively by school assemblies and a stimulating 'Thought for the Week' programme. In addition, there are also valuable experiences within subject areas, for example, exploring diversity and equality in art, promoting human rights in RE and developing a sense of social responsibility through the study of carefully selected texts in English.

The school is highly successful in encouraging pupils to actively participate in the life of the school and wider community, for example, through the school parliament, eco-group and school charity committee. These, along with opportunities to be sports captains, bilingual ambassadors and digital leaders help pupils develop strong leadership skills and to become active citizens. The school provides high quality opportunities for pupils to develop their creative skills through activities such as art clubs, a range of music groups and clubs, drama workshops, theatre visits and school theatrical productions.

The school has effective arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. There are many valuable activities that improve pupils' understanding of healthy life style choices and the value of physical exercise. These include a wide variety of extra-curricular sports activities, a cookery club and opportunities to access specialist advice and support from the school nurse.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management: Excellent

The headteacher's exceptionally strong and effective leadership over the past seven years has led to consistently high levels of attendance, exceptional pupil behaviour, and consistently high quality teaching and pupil outcomes. He has established and communicated a clear strategic vision for the school based firmly on the provision of high quality teaching and wellbeing for all of its pupils and staff. This vision is communicated effectively to all staff, pupils, and the local community. The school's mission, values and aims reflect the headteacher's aspiration to assist all pupils to fulfil their individual potential. This aspiration is clearly communicated in the school's motto, 'Tua'r goleuni – Towards the light'.

The headteacher and senior leadership team work very well together to establish an ethos of collaboration and co-operation amongst all staff and leaders. They are very effective in modelling the expected behaviours and the high levels of respect and trust between staff and pupils. They have established a clear philosophy of 'Learning Together' to ensure that the school is a place where staff and pupils work together effectively, enjoy their learning and reach their full potential.

Senior leaders have clearly defined roles that are well understood by staff. These focus pertinently on continuous improvement and the wellbeing of staff and pupils. Senior leaders have worked together exceptionally well to establish clear and effective operating procedures that ensure consistency in the school's day to day work. For example, they ensure a consistent approach by all staff to securing high rates of pupil attendance, punctuality and behaviour in class and around the school.

The school is particularly reflective, forward looking and ambitious. Senior leaders have high expectations for all aspects of its work. There is a strong culture of improvement and explicit emphasis on ensuring the highest possible quality of teaching and learning. Quality assurance arrangements are systematic, extensive and robust. This approach has contributed successfully to significant and ongoing improvements in the quality of provision, and to the excellent and sustained outcomes.

The senior leadership team values and promotes staff welfare strongly. They have developed an innovative staff charter that aims to make the school an attractive place to work and learn. There is a well-established culture of a shared responsibility for dealing with school issues, particularly in relation to researching and improving teaching and learning.

Middle leaders are highly effective. They support the work of the senior leadership team ably and there are high levels of professional trust between them. They understand the core functions of the school exceptionally well and contribute extensively to improving the quality of teaching and to pupils' wellbeing and progress. Both academic and pastoral leaders have an assured understanding of their roles and responsibilities and how they contribute to delivering the school's strategic priorities. Line management arrangements are robust and clearly understood. Performance management arrangements are effective in holding staff to account and have a strong emphasis on professional learning.

There is a particular emphasis on the forensic analysis of data. This underpins leaders' assessment of the impact of teaching and learning and leads to informed discussions between senior and middle leaders about securing further improvements. There is an extensive and focused programme of departmental reviews, lesson observations, learning walks and work scrutiny as well as consideration of staff and pupils' views. This provides leaders with a secure understanding of the quality of provision and its impact on pupils' progress. Leaders use this evidence well to inform and determine improvement strategies and initiatives that support the school's overarching ambitions and priorities.

An aspirational ethos that complements the school's philosophy of 'learning together' contributes successfully to the vibrant professional learning culture. There is a shared commitment among staff to continually improve the quality of teaching and learning. As part of this culture, all staff have a well-understood entitlement and responsibility to develop their practice through constant reflection and a broad range of relevant professional learning activities. These include a suitable balance of formal and informal pathways that are tailored to school or departmental priorities and the specific aspirations of individual staff. In particular, there is a clear emphasis on promoting effective practice both within the school and in partnership with other providers.

Many staff, including all subject leaders, participate in formal professional learning programmes. For example, programmes to cultivate the skills that enable them to become consistently outstanding teachers or to develop their leadership strategies. There are valuable opportunities for staff to take part in internal coaching arrangements where they work with an appropriate colleague to develop a personalised learning pathway. There is a particularly innovative commitment to an

'action enquiry' approach to professional learning in conjunction with a local university. This initiative supports staff extremely well to develop bespoke 'action enquiry' approaches that are identified through performance management objectives and to undertake relevant professional learning opportunities. For example, as part of an action enquiry project related to 'Cognitive Load Theory', the history department successfully trialled strategies to help pupils store and retrieve information related to Hitler's rise to power. These approaches are now being adopted in other departments.

The school is exceptionally proactive in providing leadership and contributing to a broad range of professional learning activities at local, regional, and national levels. Many staff benefit from collaboration both within the school and through established networks of professional practice. These activities enhance the school's own capacity to improve.

Governors know and understand the school's strengths and areas for improvement well. They support the headteacher and the senior leadership team effectively to deliver their vision for the school. They have the knowledge and expertise to challenge leaders to continually reflect and improve all aspects of the school's work, when necessary.

The school has effective procedures to monitor its finances. Spending is aligned closely to the school's strategic priorities. Funding is allocated fairly to departments and spending is monitored closely by the headteacher, the senior leadership team, governors and the Business Manager. The school has maintained a balanced budget for the past five years and has appropriate reserves. The school has good resources to support learning and the school provides a pleasant and attractive environment for pupils to learn. The school employs its own specialist staff, for example, an educational psychologist and specialist behavioural and autism support teachers. The school makes effective use of grant funding to directly support vulnerable pupils where appropriate.

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

Excellent	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
Adequate and needs improvement	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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