



Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**Olchfa School
Gower Road
Sketty
Swansea
SA2 7AB**

Date of inspection: May 2011

by

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



During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the school's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

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

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Context

Olchfa School is a large 11-18 mixed comprehensive school situated in a suburban area to the west of the City of Swansea. There are 1,824 pupils on roll, compared with 1,891 at the time of the previous inspection in 2005. There are 440 students in the Sixth Form. The school also has a Specialist Teaching Facility on site catering for hearing impaired pupils

The school's intake is from a varied social background and represents the full range of ability. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is 9.3%, which is well below the national average of 17.1% for secondary schools. Academic ability on entry is above national averages. The school has 10.4% of pupils on the special educational needs register, compared with the national average of 19.6% for secondary schools. About 14% of pupils come from ethnic minorities and 173 pupils (9.1%) come from homes where English is not the first language. No pupils are registered as being from homes where the predominant language spoken is Welsh.

The current headteacher was appointed in 2001 and the senior management team is a mix of recently appointed and well-established staff.

The 2010-2011 individual school budget per pupil for Olchfa School is £3,619 which compares with a maximum of £5,430 and a minimum of £3,544 for secondary schools in Swansea. The school has the 13th highest budget per pupil out of the 15 secondary schools in Swansea.

Summary

The school's current performance	Excellent
The school's prospects for improvement	Excellent

Current performance

Olchfa School is an excellent school because:

- pupils make very good progress and achieve high standards;
- there is a very effective provision to develop skills which enables pupils to become reflective, confident and independent learners;
- teaching in the school is very effective and has a considerable impact on raising and maintaining high standards; and
- there are very good procedures to develop and maintain pupils' wellbeing.

Prospects for improvement

The school's prospects for improvement are excellent because:

- the outstanding leadership provided by the headteacher;
- the leadership team is very effective and has a significant impact on outcomes;
- there are very effective processes for self-evaluation and improving quality that are clearly focused on improving teaching and learning;
- the school has an excellent track record in securing improvement; and
- the school has developed an effective learning culture where staff identify and share good practice very well.

Recommendations

R1 Improve outcomes in mathematics and science at key stage 3

R2 Strengthen the delivery of numeracy across the curriculum

R3 Refine the school improvement plan to clarify key priorities for the school

What happens next?

The school will draw up an action plan which shows how the school is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will invite the school to prepare a written case study, describing the excellent practice identified during the inspection.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Excellent

Standards: Excellent

In key stage 3, when compared with similar schools, the core subject indicator has been well above the average of the family of schools over the last four years. Pupils' performance in English is particularly good and has been in the top quarter of similar schools on the free-school-meal benchmarks for each of the last four years. In 2010, a majority of pupils gained level 6 or above in English. This is an outstanding feature. In key stage 3 assessments, reading and writing are well above the average for the family of schools. In mathematics and science, pupils' performance has been in the top half of the benchmarking group over the last four years. In 2010, the percentage of pupils who achieved level 6 or above in mathematics was higher than the family average.

The school's performance in the non-core subjects at key stage 3 is also very good. In 2010 the percentage of pupils who achieved level 5 or above in all non-core subjects was above the family average. In nearly all subjects the school's performance was the best in the family and in the top quarter of similar schools.

At key stage 4, pupils' performance is outstanding. The level 2 threshold including English and mathematics, the level 2 threshold, the core subject indicator and the level 1 threshold have all been in the top quarter of similar schools for the past three years. Performance in these four indicators has been significantly above the family average over the last three years. In 2010, the school was the highest performing in its family in these indicators. Performance in the average wider point score has improved over the last two years and was in the second quarter of similar schools in 2010.

At post-16, pupils' attainment on the wider points score was above the local and national averages in 2010, and a very high percentage (95%) of sixth form pupils gained the level 3 threshold.

At key stage 3, the difference in the performances of boys and girls is generally lower than the Wales and family averages. At key stage 4 the differences in performance are about the same as the family and lower than the Wales average. The performance of pupils eligible for free school meals in key stage 3 and key stage 4 has improved over the last three years. The difference in performance between pupils eligible for free school meals and those who do not has decreased over the same period. Pupils who receive support for literacy and pupils who have English as an additional language make good progress.

In 2010, 96% of pupils remained in full-time education at the end of key stage 4, either in the school or elsewhere, which is significantly above the average for the local authority and for Wales. Just over one percent of pupils leaving in summer 2010 are not in education, training or employment which is much better than national and local averages. In the last two years no pupil left school without a qualification.

Pupils make very good progress in each key stage in acquiring the skills and knowledge needed to move on to the next stage of learning. In most lessons observed, pupils achieved good standards, and in around half these lessons they achieved excellent standards. Pupils, including those with additional learning needs, make good and often very good progress in their lessons. Most pupils reflect very well on their learning. They assess their own work and that of their peers perceptively and with care. They are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, and know how to improve their work. Pupils respond very positively to high expectations and set themselves challenging goals.

Pupils of all ages and abilities have good communication skills. In particular, pupils have very good reading and writing skills. Most pupils express themselves clearly and thoughtfully using a wide and specific vocabulary to express their views. Most pupils read well in a variety of contexts and attain high levels of comprehension. In their written work, pupils often make well-considered and extended responses. Nearly all pupils demonstrate very good listening skills. They respond very well to questions from the teacher and are very attentive to one another, for instance, during group discussions.

Pupils make very good progress in developing the skills they need to learn effectively. Pupils work very well together in pairs and in groups to explore ideas and to develop their understanding. Many pupils develop their analytical skills very well. They evaluate and synthesise information effectively from a range of sources. They transfer skills fluently from one context to another. For example, pupils have a good understanding of how learning to plan in design and technology helps them to organise their work in English or to investigate in science.

Pupils' performance in Welsh second language at key stage 3 has improved significantly from 2009 to 2010 and is now in the top quarter of similar schools. Pupils' reading, writing and spoken Welsh are good. In key stage 4 nearly all pupils take a GCSE course in Welsh and many make good progress. In the majority of lessons, pupils make confident responses and their pronunciation is good.

Wellbeing: Excellent

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning, including levels of concentration, engagement and motivation, have a significantly positive impact on their standards of achievement.

Pupils feel very safe in school. They feel that the school deals well with any bullying and value the particularly effective contribution of the peer mentoring programme. Most pupils have positive attitudes to healthy living and understand how to improve and maintain their health. Participation levels in physical activities are high.

Pupils' behaviour is exceptionally good in classes and around the school. They are courteous, tolerant and respect each other. Attendance levels are good and compare well to similar schools.

Pupils have an appropriate say in decision-making and contribute effectively their views about what and how they learn. The school council is particularly effective and has had a beneficial impact on school life in a number of areas.

Pupils' social and life skills are very good. Most participate in community activities. Most pupils take on a wide range of responsibilities.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Excellent
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Learning experiences: Excellent

The school provides an extremely broad and balanced curriculum which fully meets statutory requirements, and the needs and aspirations of pupils. The key stage 3 curriculum builds well on pupils' experiences at key stage 2. There is a very extensive range of general and vocational courses at key stage 4 and in the sixth form.

The key stage 4 curriculum includes a comprehensive enrichment programme to enable all pupils to experience a wide range of additional activities and to learn new skills. In the sixth form a similar programme provides students with the opportunity to gain additional AS qualifications. The school also offers an exceptionally rich variety of extra-curricular activities. Pupils are able to gain additional qualifications from a range of activities, including a very well-organised and popular Duke of Edinburgh scheme. The recently introduced 'Olchfa Pathway' programme draws together all these formal, non-formal and informal activities into a coherent curriculum plan. This scheme allows pupils to consider their own needs and to widen their experiences. This is a very strong feature of the school.

The school provides outstanding support to develop pupils' skills. 'SMART' is a Year 7 programme that focuses on cross-curricular skills and themes for a few lessons each week. This programme develops very effectively pupils' learning and thinking skills as well as a variety of wider skills. It contributes effectively to improving pupils' wellbeing and to their understanding of citizenship. This programme successfully builds the foundations for pupils to become reflective, confident and independent learners and is a significant strength of the school.

There are increasing opportunities for pupils to gain the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification in key stage 4 and the sixth form. Pupils in key stage 3 follow courses leading to Essential Skills Wales qualifications. There is very effective support for pupils to improve their basic literacy skills. However, the school has not fully identified the links between mathematics and other subjects to boost opportunities for pupils to practise and reinforce numeracy skills.

The school has significantly improved provision for the Welsh language in the last three years. Nearly all key stage 4 pupils are entered for a GCSE course. There are increasing opportunities for pupils to develop their use of Welsh outside Welsh lessons. The use of incidental Welsh by teachers to improve pupils' standards is good overall.

The promotion of sustainable development is good. The eco-committee takes an active role in whole school initiatives to save energy and improve recycling. The school has a range of curriculum projects, including overseas links and visits, to develop pupils' understanding of global citizenship.

Teaching: Excellent

Teaching in the school is very effective and has a considerable impact on raising and maintaining high standards. There are many excellent features to the teaching, including very high expectations and a rigorous level of challenge. In particular, teaching is effective in engaging and motivating pupils through interesting, exciting and enjoyable activities. Most learning activities are especially successful in developing thinking skills through demanding tasks, and probing and skilful questioning.

Lessons are well-planned, follow a clear structure, and proceed at a purposeful pace. Teachers set specific objectives which they communicate clearly, foster very good relationships with pupils, and use well-prepared and appropriate materials. In a very few lessons, questioning is not incisive enough and a minority of pupils do not achieve as well as they could.

Teachers' marking of pupils' work is regular, up-to-date and contributes well to improving the standards pupils achieve. Most teachers provide pupils with a clear indication of the strengths and weaknesses in subject-specific terms, and set out clear targets for improvement. Pupils have many suitable opportunities to evaluate their own work and that of their peers.

The school has a clear and manageable system for collecting and storing assessment information. Teachers use this well to track the progress of individual pupils, to recognise any under-performance and to identify where support is needed. Reports to parents are clear and informative.

Care, support and guidance: Excellent

The school has very good procedures to develop and maintain pupils' wellbeing and to improve their emotional and personal resilience, especially for the more vulnerable pupils. These procedures ensure that pupils understand fully the school's expectations, and contribute to the excellent behaviour and the very high standards and wellbeing. The school's peer mentoring programme, known as 'CHAT', is exceptionally effective.

The school promotes pupils' social, moral and cultural development in a very positive way. Regular assemblies and form time develop very effectively pupils' beliefs and values and provide good opportunities for reflection.

Teachers and support staff provide beneficial advice and guidance to enable pupils to make informed choices about the courses they follow at key stage 4 and post-16.

The school works very effectively with a range of specialist services in order to meet the very wide range of pupils' learning, behavioural, emotional and social needs. The substance misuse prevention programme, 'HYPE', is particularly effective. External agencies train Year 10 pupils to deliver this programme to younger pupils. This has a very positive impact on pupils' wellbeing.

The school's provision for additional learning needs is good and this impacts positively upon learning outcomes. Pupils with additional learning needs are fully involved in all aspects of school life. The well-deployed team of teaching assistants provide excellent support for pupils. The school keeps parents fully informed and involved in their child's education. The annual review process satisfies statutory guidelines and individual education plans are used effectively across the school. Nearly all parents attend annual reviews.

The specialist facility for hearing impaired pupils is well-integrated into the school as a whole. Teachers and support assistants tailor the curriculum and teaching appropriately to meet the individual needs of these pupils, and as a result these pupils achieve very well.

The school has an appropriate policy and has procedures for safeguarding pupils.

Learning environment: Excellent

The school has an outstandingly positive ethos based on very high expectations and the full inclusion and involvement of all pupils. The school is especially effective in setting high expectations for pupils' achievement and standards of behaviour. Pupils respond very positively to the inclusive culture of the school where they all feel valued and involved, irrespective of their social or ethnic backgrounds. They are all given an appropriate equal opportunity to participate fully in school life. An atmosphere of tolerance and freedom from harassment or oppressive behaviour pervades the whole school.

The whole site is well maintained and secured. The buildings, apart from the mobile classrooms, are of an impressive standard given their age and meet the needs of pupils well. Colourful and instructive wall displays, which showcase pupils' work and achievements, create a vibrant learning environment. Learning resources are good.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Excellent
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Leadership: Excellent

The headteacher provides excellent strategic leadership. He communicates his vision for the school very successfully and receives outstanding support from his leadership team. Learning directors are exceptionally effective in communicating high expectations for securing improvement and challenging staff and pupils to achieve outcomes that are well above expectations.

The school provides very good opportunities for staff to take on leadership roles. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, and leaders and managers at all levels are held accountable for the quality of their work. Excellent teamwork and a culture that encourages innovation have been highly effective in raising standards of achievement.

The school analyses data rigorously to set challenging targets for pupils and to monitor their progress against them. Leaders of subjects and year teams use this data very effectively to inform teaching and learning and to motivate pupils to succeed.

Well-planned performance management arrangements are very good in challenging everyone to strive for excellence and to improve pupils' achievement.

Governors are actively involved in setting the strategic direction of the school. They are very well-informed about the work and performance of the school and are effective critical friends.

The school takes full account of national and local priorities. These feature prominently in policies and improvement plans, including Learning Pathways 14-19 and the School Effectiveness Framework.

Improving quality: Excellent

The school's processes for self-evaluation and improving quality are outstanding. Self evaluation is continuous, reflective and fully embedded into all aspects of the school's work. The school has rigorous procedures to identify strengths and weaknesses. Roles and responsibilities for monitoring and evaluating standards and the quality of provision are well understood. The well-communicated 'Quality Assurance Handbook' sets out a very clear and coherent calendar of self-evaluation and improvement planning activities.

The self evaluation process is meticulous, arrives at clear judgements and identifies accurately the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Departmental and year reviews are thorough and use data very effectively to monitor trends and progress over time.

Monitoring the quality of teaching and learning is particularly rigorous and this has a significant impact on pupils' achievement. There is a well-established culture of review, evaluation and improvement in teaching and learning. Feedback on classroom observations is thorough and focused sharply on learning and standards. Where underperformance is identified, the process is supportive and helpful. The 'Learning and Teaching Observation Group' is a focused peer observation group that very effectively identifies, celebrates and shares good practice in teaching and learning.

The school has thorough systems for gathering the views of pupils, parents, carers and the broader community on standards and the quality of provision at the school.

Leaders and managers use their detailed knowledge of the school well to plan for improvement and set clear priorities. Departmental and year plans have clear objectives, timescales and targets for improvement. However, the school improvement plan does not communicate key strategic priorities clearly enough.

The school has a very good track record in identifying and addressing areas for improvement. It has made very good progress in responding to the recommendations from the last inspection.

The school has fostered an effective learning culture and staff identify and share good practice very well. Staff meet regularly with a clear focus on improving pupil outcomes and the quality of teaching. Leaders and managers are particularly proactive in developing productive links with schools in their family.

Partnership working: Good

The school has developed good partnerships with a range of providers and agencies, locally, nationally and internationally. It works well with its partners to develop effective joint strategies and working practices. Very strong links with local community groups and parents are beneficial to all partners and impact well on pupils' achievements.

The school has very strong links with partner primary schools. There is a wide range of well-organised activities to support the transition process that focus effectively on teaching, learning and wellbeing. Good use is made of the 'CHAT' programme to assist the smooth transition of pupils from key stage 2 to key stage 3.

Good partnership arrangements with the college, other schools and a local training provider enable the school to offer a wide range of subject choices for 14 to 19-year-old pupils and to improve the efficient use of resources. The school manages and assures the quality of collaborative courses well.

Resource management: Excellent

The school manages its resources extremely well. Spending reflects the priorities in school plans and expenditure is closely monitored in order to seek the highest possible impact on pupils' achievement. There is a sensible balance between the responsibilities undertaken by governors and those delegated to the headteacher and business manager.

The school is appropriately staffed to teach the curriculum. Teaching and ancillary staff are deployed very effectively so as to make best use of their expertise. Arrangements to identify and meet the training needs of all staff are good.

The school has been very successful in planning a programme to provide the best possible standards of classroom accommodation and resources within the constraints of the budget.

In view of the outstanding outcomes, the school provides excellent value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Response to parent questionnaires

Estyn received 47 completed questionnaires from parents or carers.

Of those that responded, many parents gave a positive or very positive response to most questions. Nearly all parents are pleased with the school and most think that their children are doing well. Most parents believe that their children are expected to work hard and think that teaching is good. They say that there is a good range of activities and visits. Parents feel that the school is well led and find staff approachable if they have any questions or concerns. They think that the school helps their children to mature and take on responsibility. Nearly all say that staff have high expectations for children to work hard and do their best. Many parents say that they are well informed about their children's progress and that their children are well prepared to move on to their next stage of education or employment. A few parents are unsure as to whether their children receive the right level of additional support for their learning.

Response to learner questionnaires

Estyn received responses from 358 pupils, selected at random across all year groups. Nearly all pupils feel safe at school and have someone to talk to if they are worried. Many pupils believe that the school deals well with any bullying and pupils behave well. Nearly all pupils feel that they are encouraged to take on responsibility and to do things for themselves. Nearly all pupils feel they are doing well and that teachers help them to progress and prepare for their future. They have enough books, equipment and computers to do their work.

Many pupils say that the school teaches them to be healthy and that they have plenty of opportunities at school to get regular exercise. Many pupils in key stage 4 and the majority of pupils in the sixth form say they received good advice when choosing their option courses. Many pupils believe that the school prepares them well to move on to the next stage of their education or employment.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Sarah Lewis	Reporting Inspector
Huw Collins	Team Inspector
Stephen Davies	Team Inspector
Mererid Stone	Team Inspector
Nigel Vaughan	Team Inspector
Peter Harris (AI)	Team Inspector
Edward Tipper	Lay Inspector
Julian Davis	Peer Inspector
Johne Cowley (Deputy Headteacher)	School Nominee

Copies of the report

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Year groups and key stages

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

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

Primary phase:

Year	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Ages	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11

Secondary phase:

Year	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13
Ages	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18

The four key stages cover the following year groups:

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