



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

**A report on**  
**St David's College**

**Date of inspection: November 2019**

**by**

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

## About St David's College

St David's College is an independent day and boarding school that educates boys and girls from age 9 to 19 years. The school is situated in extensive grounds, just south of Llandudno in North Wales.

The school opened in 1965, as an educational charity established by Trust Deed, in order to provide secondary education within a Christian framework. The school's mission is to 'develop the whole person through a broad education founded on Christian principles, a wide choice of interest and activity, and an achievable personal programme for each pupil'.

There are currently 250 pupils on roll of whom 95 are boarders. This total includes 27 in Years 5 and 6, as well as 154 pupils aged from 11 to 16 years in the senior school, and a further 69 in the sixth form. Overall, there are approximately twice as many boys than girls although the precise balance varies in year groups across the school.

Around half of pupils, including some boarders, come from the local areas of Gwynedd, Conwy and the Isle of Anglesey. Others come from across the United Kingdom and from Ireland. Approximately 12% come from overseas, including from expatriate communities around the world, children of service personnel as well as pupils from other countries in the European Union. Around 7% of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Almost all pupils speak English as their first language at home. A very few speak Welsh or another language.

St David's College educates pupils with a broad range of abilities. Around 50% of pupils have a diagnosis of dyslexia or another specific learning difficulty. Just over 16% of pupils have a statement of special educational need (SEN) or an education, health and care plan (EHCP). The school offers additional specialist support for pupils within its literacy and numeracy units. The level of support is tailored to meet pupils' individual learning needs.

The last core inspection was in October 2012. Since that inspection, there have been significant changes to the leadership team. The current headteacher took up his post in June 2017. The restructured leadership team includes the bursar, the registrar and the director of strategic development, a deputy headteacher and two assistant headteachers as well as the school chaplain and the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo).

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

Leadership at all levels is successful in fostering a collective vision of St David's as an inclusive, nurturing family community that promotes engaging and beneficial learning experiences for all pupils. Pupils thrive in the calm and supportive environment, enhancing their self-esteem and achieving high levels of wellbeing during their time at the school.

Pupils of all ages make strong progress in developing their social and communication skills and achieve high standards in relation to their learning needs and abilities. In particular, the school's high-quality learning support provision helps pupils to develop effective learning strategies to overcome their difficulties, improve their self-confidence and to make secure progress in line with their abilities. These outcomes prepare pupils of all abilities well for relevant further educational experiences and future employment opportunities.

Teaching at St David's is characterised by the supportive and nurturing working relationships between staff and pupils. These relationships help build pupils' confidence and trust and contribute significantly to pupils' developing knowledge, understanding and skills. The curriculum builds effectively on pupils' previous learning and supports their progress successfully. The school provides an outstanding range of creative, cultural, recreational and sporting opportunities. The extensive outdoor education programme that lies at the heart of the school's life and mission makes a fundamental contribution to pupils' resilience, personal development and wellbeing.

The school meets all of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

<b>Inspection area</b>	<b>Judgement</b>
<b>Standards</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Wellbeing and attitudes to learning</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Teaching and learning experiences</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Care, support and guidance</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>Good</b>

## **Compliance with the regulations for registration**

Independent school inspections are governed by the Education Act 2002 and related regulations: the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. These regulations require an independent school to meet an appropriate standard in the following areas:

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

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

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

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **The suitability of proprietors and staff**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **The provision of information**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

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

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Ensure that learning activities provide sufficient levels of challenge for all pupils, particularly the more able
- R2 Improve the consistency of teachers' feedback to pupils and the quality of their responses
- R3 Strengthen quality assurance and improvement planning arrangements

## **What happens next**

Estyn advises the proprietor to amend its current development plan to show what actions 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/carers at the school.

Estyn will invite the school to prepare case studies on its work in relation to the outstanding outdoor education and activities programme that makes a fundamental contribution to pupils' skills, personal development and wellbeing, and in relation to the school's provision for learning support, particularly the comprehensive and robust processes for identifying and monitoring pupils' individual learning needs and the provision of whole school expert support to meet these needs.

## Main findings

### Standards: Good

St David's College educates pupils with a wide range of abilities. The majority receive specialist teaching predominantly for specific learning difficulties. Pupils' abilities and the nature of their SEN differ from year to year. Despite this, across the school pupils achieve high standards in relation to their learning needs and abilities. These outcomes prepare them well for relevant further educational experiences and future employment opportunities.

Many pupils have a secure recall of previous learning. They apply this knowledge successfully to solve problems or to understand new concepts, for example when considering the factors that affect the climate in a particular location.

Pupils of all ages make strong progress in developing their social and communication skills. In Year 5 and Year 6, most pupils develop their speaking and listening skills well. They are articulate and use a wide range of appropriate vocabulary. Nearly all pupils across the school listen carefully to teachers' explanations and the ideas of their peers. They have the confidence to discuss particular issues and express their opinions about specific topics. A few pupils ask thoughtful questions to clarify and extend their understanding about new concepts. The majority speak clearly and confidently, using appropriate technical terms and showing good expression, tone and emphasis. In performing arts, for example, many Year 8 pupils create amusing and expressive comedic drama pieces exploring themes such as hierarchy and personal relationships. However, a few pupils lack the confidence to respond in detail to teachers' questions or to offer their views and ideas.

Many pupils make appropriate progress with their reading skills. The majority of Year 5 and Year 6 pupils read aloud with fluency and confidence. They display enthusiasm for reading and are keen to share their thoughts about the novels they have read. Many pupils across the school have well-developed reading skills. They read effectively to locate and organise relevant information from a range of texts. In biology, for example, Year 11 pupils prepare detailed explanations of the process of homeostasis. The majority of Year 9 pupils show a secure understanding of the use of a range of poetic techniques to create effect or express emotion. Many Year 11 pupils describe accurately how the author portrays the personality and attitudes of particular characters when studying 'An Inspector Calls'.

The majority of pupils write accurately in line with their abilities and level of literacy difficulties, using relevant subject-specific language appropriately. They produce thoughtful written accounts using suitable structure and punctuation. For example, in geography, the majority of Year 9 pupils construct informative accounts, based on their research about the lives of nomads in Kazakhstan. In English, the majority of Year 9 pupils create engaging poetry exploring themes such as personal loss, with a few pupils producing particularly evocative pieces that capture mood and emotions effectively. However, a few pupils do not develop their written responses fully. Their accounts lack depth and detail. A minority of pupils of all abilities often make careless spelling and punctuation errors.

The majority of pupils apply their numeracy skills successfully across the curriculum. For example, in Year 5 and Year 6, pupils research the impact on the heart rate of a range of activities such as sitting, walking, jumping and jogging. They record their data findings appropriately to show how the heart rate changes during these activities. In geography, the majority of Year 9 pupils reach thoughtful conclusions when analysing data about climatic conditions in specific international locations. In science, Year 11 pupils create accurate graphs to show the effects of changes in temperature and pressure on the production of ammonia.

Many pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) applications, including assistive technology such as speech recognition software, beneficially to help them develop their communication skills and to support their learning. In their business studies project work, pupils use ICT applications and employ their numeracy skills effectively to analyse and present their conclusions about the costs, prices and profits related to developing and marketing a new fruit drink.

Many pupils apply their creative skills successfully in their appealing artwork, engaging dramatic performances, innovative design products and imaginative musical compilations. In their experiences across the curriculum and the school's activities programme, many pupils develop valuable teamwork and leadership skills. All pupils participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award achieving high success rates at all levels.

At key stage 4, in each of the last three years, many pupils have achieved the level 2 threshold (equivalent to five GCSEs at grades A\* to C). Over the same period the majority of pupils have achieved the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics. These outcomes compare well with national averages. For the last three years, no pupil has left the school without a recognised qualification.

In the last three years at post 16, the majority of entries in level 3 qualifications have been at grades A\*-C or equivalent. At the end of Year 13, nearly all pupils progress to further or higher education, or to relevant employment.

### **Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good**

The school is a particularly supportive and inclusive family community. Pupils thrive in the calm, caring and encouraging atmosphere that permeates the school. They benefit immensely from the nurturing environment, developing their wellbeing and self-confidence successfully during their time at the school.

Nearly all pupils behave in a mature and respectful manner in lessons and around the site. They are polite and courteous to staff and to each other, and extremely welcoming to visitors. Nearly all pupils feel safe and secure in school. They know whom to turn to if they have a concern and are confident that any incidents of bullying that may arise are dealt with effectively.

Most pupils understand clearly the importance of eating healthily and the benefits of regular exercise in promoting their fitness and wellbeing. Participation rates in the extensive programme of sporting and recreational extra-curricular activities are extremely high. Pupils participate enthusiastically in the challenging, engaging and beneficial outdoor education programme that includes a fortnightly full day's activity

for all pupils up to Year 10. All take part in a broad range of additional enrichment activities, including gardening, art and driving a 4x4 off-road vehicle.

Most pupils have positive attitudes to their learning. They are enthusiastic and well-motivated in lessons. Most work constructively, both independently and when co-operating in pairs or small groups with their peers. In physical education, for example, sixth-form pupils work successfully in small teams to devise and construct small towers using cocktail sticks and adhesive putty. However, a very few pupils are not punctual to school. A very few are passive learners and do not always apply themselves diligently to their tasks.

Sixth-form pupils take on a range of leadership roles willingly. They support younger pupils beneficially, for example in helping them with their reading, as well as arranging specific social activities and a variety of house events and competitions.

The school council is an active group that meets regularly and makes valuable contributions to school life. These pupils have negotiated changes to the current school uniform and influenced the purchase of lockers for pupils to store their belongings during the school day. The food committee meets with the head chef to discuss and improve the quality of menus for boarding pupils.

Most pupils develop successfully as tolerant, responsible and caring citizens. They organise a range of charitable and humanitarian activities including developing worthwhile links with a local foodbank and donating Christmas presents for children.

### **Teaching and learning experiences: Good**

The school provides a curriculum that is broad and balanced and meets the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. This inclusive curriculum addresses the needs of pupils of all abilities well.

The curriculum builds effectively on pupils' previous learning and supports their progress and wellbeing successfully. In key stage 4 and in the sixth form, the school offers pupils suitable and flexible academic and vocational pathways. These courses provide beneficial opportunities for all pupils to gain a valuable range of relevant qualifications.

The school provides an outstanding range of enriching cultural, recreational and sporting opportunities to enhance and extend pupils' learning experiences. These include participation in regular drama productions and musical ensembles. The extensive outdoor activities programme lies at the heart of the school's mission to help pupils acquire confidence and self-esteem and to find and develop their gifts and talents. This programme provides all pupils with opportunities to engage in a broad range of challenging and exhilarating activities that help them to develop their resilience, team-working and leadership skills. Pupils also have valuable opportunities to take part in stimulating international trips and pursuits such as husky sledding in Sweden and surfing and scuba diving in Morocco.

There is a beneficial range of purposeful opportunities for pupils to develop their social and communication skills as well as their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. In Year 5 to Year 8, effective project-based approaches help reinforce and extend these



skills across the curriculum. Teachers use pair and group work well to encourage and support the development of pupils' oracy and thinking skills. Pupils benefit from relevant ICT provision to enhance their learning. An extensive programme of valuable targeted interventions helps support the progress of those pupils with weaker skills. Overall, however, strategies to promote the progressive development of pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills across the curriculum are not co-ordinated systematically.

The school offers worthwhile provision for pupils to develop their understanding of Welsh culture and heritage. This includes celebration of Welsh culture in assemblies, opportunities to participate in the eisteddfod week and the use of the 'Tocyn Iaith' as part of the school's awards system.

Teaching at St David's is characterised by the supportive and nurturing working relationships between staff and pupils. These relationships help to build pupils' confidence and trust and contribute successfully to their learning and personal development.

Most teachers know their pupils particularly well and have a secure awareness of the specific learning needs of individual pupils. This helps these teachers to plan effectively to meet the needs of these pupils. In many cases, teachers create an engaging and positive learning environment. They plan a well-structured and interesting range of purposeful activities supported by helpful resources that assist pupils to make strong progress in developing their knowledge and skills. In particular, these teachers use specific ICT applications such as assistive technology and relevant support strategies to help all pupils develop their confidence and self-esteem, and to achieve success.

Many teachers use questioning effectively to reinforce earlier learning and prepare pupils for new topics and concepts. In many cases, teachers target questions skilfully to encourage pupils of differing abilities to develop their thinking. The majority of teachers probe pupils further to extend their responses and consolidate their understanding.

In many instances, teachers provide detailed explanations and model effective approaches and techniques beneficially, for example when portraying comedic drama or demonstrating specific skills and strategies in physical education. In particular, there is a strong emphasis on developing pupils' awareness and use of relevant terminology.

In a few cases, a lack of effective preparation prevents pupils from achieving intended outcomes. For example, learning activities are not planned well enough to meet the needs of pupils of differing abilities, including to provide suitable challenge to more able pupils.

Most teachers monitor pupils' progress well. They use praise effectively to encourage pupils and provide helpful verbal feedback and additional support where appropriate to reinforce pupils' understanding. Many teachers provide supportive and constructive written feedback to pupils. There is a recent and developing emphasis on providing clear advice to help pupils improve the quality of their work. However, assessment strategies are not applied consistently. As a result, pupils are

not always aware of the progress they are making in relation to their individual targets and there is not a sustained approach to ensuring that pupils refine and improve the quality of work.

### **Care, support and guidance: Excellent**

St David's College provides pupils with an exceptional quality of care, support and guidance. It is an inclusive, nurturing family community where staff promote a culture of trust and respect in which pupils thrive. Staff know their pupils extremely well and have high expectations for their wellbeing. The enthusiastic and confident manner in which pupils respond to all aspects of the school's life and work reflects this approach strongly.

Processes for assessing pupils' learning needs and tracking their progress are comprehensive and robust. Staff at the school's specialist provision, the Cadogan centre, use assessment information particularly well to identify each individual pupil's specific needs and to inform a range of highly-appropriate bespoke interventions. These staff provide expert support to help pupils develop effective learning strategies to overcome their difficulties and to make secure progress. The centre provides mainstream teachers with helpful guidance and useful resources to enhance their skills and expertise. As a result, teachers across the school have a well-developed understanding of how best to support those pupils who experience difficulties with literacy and numeracy. This is a particularly strong feature of the school's work.

The broader school team of speech and language therapists, occupational therapist, nurses and counsellors enhances the school's provision considerably. Their work assists the school to implement comprehensive and effective approaches to support pupils' emotional, health and social needs. The school has fostered beneficial links with a range of external agencies to ensure that pupils receive the specific support they require in a timely manner. Over time, as pupils develop strategies to support their learning and improve their confidence and self-esteem, they learn to celebrate their individual differences.

Across the school, there is a strong, integrated emphasis on promoting pupils' spiritual, intellectual and physical development. In particular, aspects such as the outdoor education programme and specific 'compassion' projects help pupils to appreciate their own circumstances, to develop resilience and self-confidence, and to discover their particular strengths.

The extensive programme of high-quality extra-curricular activities ensures that pupils have ample opportunities to develop their fitness and improve their wellbeing. Many of these activities offer useful experiences for pupils to develop independence and leadership skills to support them in their adult lives. The school is highly successful in encouraging pupils to express their creative talents and develop their cultural awareness through the valuable opportunities provided across a broad range of musical groups, theatrical productions and art clubs.

The school's ethos encourages all members of the community to show understanding, respect and tolerance for others. The school has established a worthwhile partnership with a local food bank to which pupils regularly donate food. This innovative project is helping pupils to make an important contribution to the local

community and to take responsibility for improving the lives of others. Pupils are currently collecting bags of Christmas presents for children whose parents depend on this food bank. However, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to influence strategic developments and contribute to a range of decision-making across the school.

There are valuable and regular opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of the wider world and to reflect on important issues that impact on their lives and the lives of others. For example, pupils explore other cultures when performing the traditional Gamelan music of Indonesia. Close work with schools in Uganda helps pupils to learn about the challenges experienced by children living in remote parts of Africa. These activities encourage pupils to develop respectful attitudes and secure values and beliefs.

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

### **Leadership and management: Good**

Leadership across the school is successful in fostering a collective vision of St David's College as an inclusive, nurturing family community that promotes a broad range of high-quality learning experiences for all pupils. This approach contributes significantly to pupils' wellbeing and the high standards pupils achieve in relation to their individual learning needs and abilities.

The headteacher provides thoughtful and empowering leadership. Over the past two years, he has restructured the senior leadership team to delegate and distribute leadership roles appropriately and to ensure that specific leadership responsibilities support the school's key priorities. During this period of change, the collaborative and collegiate leadership team and staff body have maintained high standards of achievement and provided effective support for pupils' welfare. This is a strong feature of the school's work.

Leaders at all levels have a secure understanding of their roles and responsibilities. In particular, leaders recognise their accountability for the quality of teaching and learning and for the progress and achievement of all pupils. Nearly all leaders have established supportive and beneficial working relationships with colleagues in their teams.

The school carries out a broad range of quality assurance activities, including lesson observations, work scrutiny, departmental reviews and pupil and parent surveys. Leaders also analyse performance data and pupil outcomes, and consider the findings of external scrutiny to help identify key priorities for improvement. As a result, the school has strengthened its use of pupil progress data and developed beneficial individual passports to help staff plan effectively to meet pupils' particular needs. However, the school does not always identify well enough precise areas for improvement, particularly in relation to the quality of teaching and learning.

There is a useful programme of professional development activities that supports the school's key priorities, for example to improve the use of technology to support learning and to ensure pupils' safety and wellbeing. However, findings from quality assurance activities and from performance management are not used well enough to identify relevant professional learning needs.

Governors have a clear commitment to maintaining the strong school ethos and to supporting its future development. There is a well-established committee structure that reflects the core purposes of the school. Members of the governing body possess a broad range of relevant expertise that helps them offer pertinent and valuable advice. Governors provide suitable challenge to the leadership team about certain aspects of the school's work. Overall, the governing body has a sound understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and articulates a clear strategic vision for the school.

The finance manager, headteacher and governors manage the budget well. Through prudent financial planning and well-considered spending decisions, the school is in a secure position to support its strategic priorities.

The school meets all of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

## Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from parent and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teaching and support staff through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- meet proprietors, school leaders and individual members of teaching and support staff to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- visit lessons and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school had taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body, information on pupils' wellbeing, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website ([www.estyn.gov.wales](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

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

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

The report was produced in accordance with 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.

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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