



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

A report on

St Clare's School

**Porthcawl
Bridgend
CF36 5NR**

Date of inspection: November 2022

by

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

About St Clare's School

Name of provider	St Clare's School
Proprietor	Cognita
Local authority	Bridgend County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent All Age School
Residential provision?	No
Number of pupils on roll	249
Pupils of statutory school age	216
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	04/01/2015
Start date of inspection	21/11/2022
The local authority fund four children for early education. There is no specific reporting on these pupils' skills as there were fewer than six children present at the time of the inspection.	

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection. Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: mylocalschool.gov.wales

- a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

Overview

St Clare's is a welcoming school community that places a strong emphasis on pupil well-being. Pupils are happy to come to school and have positive working relationships with staff.

Across the school, pupils are articulate and confident, and treat each other and visitors with respect. While having strong mathematical and English language skills, pupils do not always apply these skills with equal strength and accuracy in other subjects across the curriculum. Overall, most pupils make strong progress during their time at the school.

The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum, showing a strong understanding of child development in the nursery. Practitioners in the nursery have high expectations of their pupils, whilst in Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 teachers offer strong support to improve pupils' examination technique. However, in Key Stage 3 learning activities and feedback do not always challenge pupils to make the progress they are capable of.

Across the school, a broad range of co-curricular activities offer pupils the opportunity to extend their learning experiences and develop their creative skills.

Pupils value the leadership opportunities provided by the school, including 'Helpwr Heddiw' in the nursery and take these positions of responsibility seriously. Pupils have influenced the school's decision to introduce gender-neutral toilets and a gender-neutral school uniform.

The proprietor provides strong support to the school via audits and professional learning opportunities. In addition, leaders have a clear vision to develop each individual to achieve their best. However, the extensive range of improvement plans across the school mean that staff have differing priorities. As a result, there is not a clear enough understanding across the school of the most important areas for improvement. In addition, activities do not always focus clearly enough on improving pupil outcomes.

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

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 plans for school improvement are manageable and focus clearly on improving pupil outcomes
- R2 Strengthen arrangements to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum
- R3 Improve the progress of pupils at Key Stage 3

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.

Main findings

Learning

Pupils join St Clare's with a wide range of abilities. By the end of Key Stage 2, most pupils make strong progress, particularly in developing their English and mathematical skills. By the end of Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, many pupils make strong progress. However, on occasions the provision does not allow pupils in Key Stage 3 and more able pupils across the school to make the progress they are capable of.

Pupils have highly developed communication skills. Nearly all pupils are articulate and most are confident speaking to visitors, for example when Year 6 eagerly explain their roles and responsibilities. Many pupils have exceptional communication skills and present their ideas and thoughts in an organised and eloquent manner, using correct subject terminology. Across the school, pupils listen attentively and with respect to teachers and their peers.

Most pupils are confident in responding to questions in class. In the preparatory school, many pupils ask their peers probing questions, such as 'How do we know that swords looked like that?' and 'Why aren't there any clothes or wood in the grave?'. Most offer logical answers to questions posed by their peers and by the teacher. In drama, Year 11 pupils respond confidently to questions from the teacher and their peers as they 'hot seat' to develop their character in Michael Morpurgo's War Horse.

In addition to their strong speaking skills, most pupils in the nursery class make appropriate progress in their ability to speak Welsh and use familiar words and phrases when they interact with adults during their activities. Many pupils count to 10 in Welsh, name colours, select which fruit they would like as a snack and follow simple instruction such as 'amser tacluso' and say 'diolch' naturally.

As pupils progress through the school, most develop their reading skills well. Across the school, the standards of reading are at least appropriate for the age and ability of pupils and successfully enable them to access materials across the curriculum. In the preparatory school, many pupils attempt to pronounce unfamiliar words using well established strategies and Year 5 pupils read confidently and talk knowledgeably about inference and prediction. In history lessons in the senior school, pupils successfully access higher order texts relating to propaganda produced by the Gestapo and SS.

The standard of writing in English across the school is strong. In Year 3 and Year 4 pupils write at length, for different purposes, drafting and refining their work. Many pupils write interesting creative stories, based on historical and fictional characters, such as Anne Boleyn or Beowulf. A few more able pupils use tension and suspense successfully to create written work that engages with the reader. Older pupils in the senior school, use well understood processes to write extended pieces of work, often in response to examination questions. However, when writing in other subjects across the curriculum, pupils do not always write at the same high standard as they do in English.

Across the school, most pupils develop strong mathematical skills. In the preparatory school, a very few pupils have exceptional mathematical skills, identifying abstract patterns using their understanding of times tables. In Year 4, pupils deploy effective strategies to remember which is the 'x' axis and 'y' axis. In Year 10, many pupils have a strong understanding of calculating the volumes of 3D shapes. In the sixth form, most pupils can accurately apply their mathematical skills to complete calculations in physics relating to energy, force and power. However overall, when applying their numeracy skills in other subjects across the curriculum, pupils do not always do so at the same high standard or level of accuracy as they do in mathematics lessons.

In the preparatory school, pupils are developing their digital skills well, for example pupils in Year 1 independently access tasks using QR codes and can complete a simple digital form to express how they are feeling. In Year 5, pupils create an online booklet, including pictures, audio and videos to inform a time travelling child from the Tudor period about life today. Pupils in the senior school, use their Information technology (IT) skills effectively to retrieve and communicate information.

Most pupils show strong creative and artistic skills. Standards are especially high amongst those pupils who have chosen to study art, textiles or graphics at GCSE or A Level, for example when designing vibrant and imaginative costumes for their final examination piece. Most pupils in the preparatory school show good progression in their art skills from cutting in straight and wavy lines in the nursery and reception to creating detailed Victorian silhouettes in Year 6. By the end of their time in the preparatory school, pupils show the breadth of their musical talents, for example when the junior rock band performs 'Eye of the Tiger' with musicality and confidence. In the senior school, pupils enthusiastically embrace the opportunity to perform in the school's production of Oliver!

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils feel part of a welcoming school community where they feel safe. Pupils are considerate and caring towards one another. In lessons, most pupils behave well, treat each other with respect and show courtesy to one another. As a result, pupils develop a positive sense of well-being and mutual respect for one another throughout the school. This is evident for example, in pupils joining from other schools who find that they settle quickly into school life and make new friends.

Nearly all pupils are polite, thoughtful and considerate when moving around the school and greeting guests. Nearly all preparatory school pupils play respectfully with one another, taking turns appropriately and sharing resources or play equipment. Across the school, many pupils enjoy their lessons and demonstrate sustained interest. They are attentive to their teachers and to each other, they concentrate well and engage effectively in paired and group work. Most pupils demonstrate suitable levels of independence in their work when it is required, whilst approaching unfamiliar topics and concepts with an enquiring mind.

In the nursery, nearly all pupils develop strong independent learning skills. For example, they choose resources in the home corner independently to hold a tea party. They show respect and courtesy towards their peers and resources when asking if other children would like a cup of tea. Pupils in the nursery class take their

responsibilities seriously, such as the 'Helpwr Heddiw' taking responsibility for feeding the class fish and watering the class plants.

Across the school, most pupils show confidence in their lessons and persevere when they encounter challenges. Most pupils respond well to oral feedback. For example, in the preparatory school when Year 4 pupils discover and use mathematical coordinates. Pupils in Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 in particular make good use of their teachers' written feedback and use this to improve their work successfully.

Nearly all pupils have positive working relationships with staff and understand that they can approach a range of adults in school for specific help if they need to. Pupils and teachers know each other very well. Pupils feel valued by staff and know that support is readily available should they need it, especially with their learning and their well-being.

Pupils make effective and purposeful use of the school grounds, including the outdoor learning areas and the Forest School where they continue their learning outside of the classroom. Many pupils demonstrate an awareness of healthy choices, for example in the reception class where pupils explain why fruit is a healthy food choice.

Across the school, pupils participate enthusiastically in a wide range of co-curricular activities. For example, in the preparatory school these include chess, cross-country, fitness and musical theatre. In addition, in the senior school, pupils enjoy chess club, French cookery, football and netball, as well as clubs for drama, computer programming, science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and film.

Across the school, pupils willingly take on a range of positions of responsibility. For example, by holding a position in one of the two school councils or becoming a prefect. In many cases these roles have a specific focus such as school transition or digital learning. Members of both school councils consider suggestions made by other pupils and how these can be taken forward, working with staff to develop aspects of the school. Pupils who hold these responsibilities take them seriously and are keen to improve the school by 'leaving a legacy' for the benefit of all pupils.

Nearly all pupils in the preparatory school feel listened to when it comes to their views about school, with many pupils in the senior school feeling the same. Head pupils in the senior school meet with the headteacher to share feedback on a regular basis and value this opportunity for open dialogue. However, a minority of pupils are not clear on the role of the school council or how to get their views across.

Pupils across the school are delighted to support a range of charities each year and are very keen to raise money for good causes. In addition, pupils engage with the community directly, such as visiting local care homes or carrying out a group litter-pick on local beaches.

Teaching and learning experiences

The school's curriculum provides pupils with a broad, flexible, and varied range of learning opportunities that supports the individual needs of the pupils well and

develops the well-being of pupils successfully. The curriculum meets all the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

In the nursery, practitioners have a strong understanding of child development. They use this knowledge well to plan stimulating activities that develop pupils' skills holistically across areas of learning. For example, practitioners use worthwhile opportunities to develop pupils' knowledge of 2D shapes in English and Welsh by encouraging them to talk about the shapes they are using to create 'cheesy' mice. Practitioners plan purposeful opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of the Welsh language and Welsh culture. For example, they use Welsh mining resources to spark pupils' curiosity and to learn more about mining in Welsh communities.

In the preparatory school, learning activities support pupils to grow in confidence and develop their desire for learning. They provide all pupils with opportunities to engage in a broad range of activities that help them to develop their resilience, team-working and leadership skills. Staff make exceptional use of the Forest School. They include worthwhile opportunities for pupils to explore, discover, learn and manage risk within defined parameters. Younger pupils are encouraged to make choices by alternating between creative and imaginative play and more practical skills such as digging and making mud pies.

Across the senior school there is strong provision to develop literacy and numeracy skills in discreet English and mathematics lessons. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to show and develop these skills to the same high standards across the curriculum. There is an appropriate range of academic qualifications available in the senior school at both GCSE and A Level. In nearly all cases the school ensures that pupils can study their individual choice of subjects. However, there are limited opportunities for sixth form pupils to develop their physical skills, for example through timetabled games lessons.

Across the school, a well-planned and structured programme of personal and social education (PSE) is in place to support the development of pupils' social and emotional skills. In the senior school, timetabled lessons are supplemented by enrichment days, which bring the whole school together to focus on a particular theme. However, at the time of the inspection, the quality of PSE for older pupils is limited by both a lack of curriculum time and a lack of specialist teachers.

In all parts of the school the curriculum is enhanced by a range of beneficial co-curricular clubs and activities. These strengthen and extend the learning experiences of pupils, developing their sporting, problem-solving, and creative skills. The school is beginning to re-establish valuable fieldtrips and visits to further enrich pupils' learning, following the pandemic restrictions. For example, nursery pupils visit Ogmore Castle whilst the sixth form attend UK wide university open days.

Nearly all teachers have extremely positive working relationships with their pupils and there are high levels of mutual respect. Teachers know their pupils very well and successfully create an atmosphere where pupils are confident to ask questions and are not afraid to get things wrong. Class management and the pace of teaching are appropriate and ensure that most pupils are fully engaged in the lessons.

Practitioners in the nursery have high expectations of pupils and use questioning effectively to develop pupils' thinking and problem-solving skills. They have a sound understanding of when to let pupils work independently and when to intervene to develop pupils' skills further.

At Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5, nearly all teachers have strong subject knowledge. Their secure understanding of external assessment requirements, and use of a wide range of valuable strategies help pupils to improve their examination technique. Many teachers use questioning techniques skilfully to develop pupils' thinking and understanding of complex topics. For example, in chemistry to draw out effectively rates of reaction of metals with the air, and help pupils explain that metals dull when reacting with oxygen.

However, on too many occasions in Key Stage 3 particularly, teachers overly scaffold activities which on occasions, constrains pupil progress. Where this happens, the provision for these pupils does not provide enough useful opportunities for independent work or to develop their writing and presentation skills.

In lessons across the school, most teachers provide high-quality, constructive verbal feedback which identifies how pupils can improve their work. Teachers encourage and respond well to pupil's curiosity. They value pupil questions and views during lessons and make sure they create sufficient time for pupils to respond to strengthen and reinforce learning. This makes pupils feel valued and ensures that they have an active voice in their own learning.

Nearly all teachers provide detailed written feedback for pupils in Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 which allows them to progress rapidly and improve their examination performance. However, across the rest of the school, teachers' written feedback is inconsistent and their comments are not always clear enough to enable pupils to know how well they are doing, and what they need to do to improve their work.

Reports to parents are informative and clearly set out next steps for pupils' learning as well as target and challenge grades. However, in general, the use of formative assessment information and data on pupil outcomes is underdeveloped. It is not always used well enough by teachers and leaders to inform practice and help pupils to move their learning forward.

Care, support and guidance

The school places a high priority on the well-being of pupils and this has been a particular focus both during and since the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff know their pupils extremely well and meet pupils' well-being needs highly effectively. Working relationships between staff and pupils are nearly always highly respectful, caring, and supportive. The school uses a variety of resources to support pupil well-being effectively, for example proactive mental health monitoring questionnaires and, until recently, access to specialist counselling. Overall, these approaches and relationships are a strong feature of the school.

The school creates and maintains a safe environment for all pupils, including effective site security and access arrangements for the school's visitors. There is an established and well-understood system to report safeguarding concerns regarding

pupils or adults, although staff awareness of how to report potential concerns about the headteacher is inconsistent. The school maintains highly detailed safeguarding records, and on the very few occasions when it has been necessary, make timely referrals to outside agencies. The school has rigorous processes to monitor the attendance of pupils. The school supports pupils with underlying medical conditions effectively. For example, pupils with allergies are served lunch first to reduce the risk of cross contamination. Furthermore, leaders ensure that first aid training for all staff exceeds mandatory requirements. In addition, the school has thorough safer recruitment procedures and all staff complete regular safeguarding update training. Consequently, leaders have successfully embedded a strong culture of safeguarding.

The school offers the very few pupils with additional learning needs bespoke provision including in-class support, one-to-one support or the services of external agencies if appropriate. Helpfully, the school also supports a much wider group of pupils through this provision if required, which enables these pupils to make strong progress.

The newly appointed additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCo) collaborates well with partner schools and external organisations, to support pupils and to raise staff awareness effectively. The school works well with the local authority and specialist services to support pupils. It also supports parents with referrals to private practitioners, for example for dyslexia screening.

The ALNCo reviews pupils' assessment information regularly to identify any whose progress is not in line with their abilities or stage of development. In addition, the ALNCo works with pupils to devise useful profiles of their individual needs and plan for their future learning. However, these plans are at an early stage of development and do not focus closely enough on pupils' skills. As a result, teachers do not always tailor learning opportunities appropriately.

The school has extensive grounds that support pupil well-being and learning well. These areas make a valuable contribution to developing pupils' understanding of their environment and the importance of both a healthy body and a healthy mind. Many pupils have regular opportunities to participate in music or sport, or to display their artistic creations which are celebrated by the school with families via social media and newsletters.

The school encourages pupils to support national charities, which gives them a sense of the importance of local and national issues and the impact that these have on different members of society. These activities are all pupil designed and led. Collectively pupils choose which charities to support each academic year, and the head pupils promote these actively in assemblies and organise a creative range of fund-raising activities, such as bake sales or activities connected to the FIFA World Cup.

Leaders take good account of suggestions from pupil voice groups, although all pupils can contribute their views directly to staff, via the suggestion boxes placed around the school, or through the annual pupil voice survey. Leaders have recently acted upon this feedback and are currently trialling a new approach to rewards and consequences.

The active preparatory and senior school councils provide worthwhile leadership opportunities for pupils. There are further opportunities for pupils to learn how to lead within the re-launched house system and clubs, for example the eco-committee or inclusion and diversity club. These roles support the development of pupils' self-confidence and responsibility. Importantly these opportunities also help pupils influence the work of the school, for example the introduction of both gender-neutral toilets and school uniform.

Leadership and management

Since the last inspection, there has been a change of headteacher and the leadership team has been extended, with a change to members' roles and responsibilities. Together, the school family shares the headteacher's clear vision to develop each individual to achieve their best. Leaders have established a robust, caring culture of safeguarding.

Leaders work closely together to take on board suggestions from staff and promote staff well-being. There is a track record of bringing about improvements, for example to the provision for early years and in beginning to address the ALN reforms. However, across the school, as a result of recent staffing and leadership changes, alongside the disruption caused by the pandemic, many of the recent improvements are at an early stage of development.

Cognita gives worthwhile support and challenge to the school, for example in forming a governing body and recently, ensuring a smooth transition to the new chair of governors. They provide suitable strategic direction and monitor the finances robustly. In addition, they provide professional audits of the provision for safeguarding and health and safety, support for human resources and professional learning opportunities. As the pandemic forced lockdowns, Cognita took swift action to supply enough digital devices for every pupil to learn online using the same format and platform.

Members of the governing body and officers employed by the proprietor visit the school regularly, for example to offer first-hand support in implementing improvement and development priorities. In addition, they have recently appointed a former headteacher from a neighbouring school also owned by Cognita to act as a school improvement partner.

In the nursery, the leader has developed a clear vision for the Curriculum for Wales based on providing pupils with a wide range of authentic learning experiences to develop their skills consistently across areas of learning. She shares this vision clearly to develop elements of high-quality teaching. Leaders in the nursery make good use of streamlined self-evaluation procedures to identify and improve specific areas of provision and pupil standards. An example of this is arranging professional opportunities for staff to develop their Welsh language skills. Practitioners have used this training highly effectively to improve pupils' Welsh language skills and their use of Welsh independently in their play.

Leaders have resumed a comprehensive programme of monitoring following the disruption caused by COVID-19. Staff contribute to the self-evaluation process through annual professional development time and leaders' regular monitoring

activities. There is a valuable assessment and monitoring calendar that shares relevant information with staff about when leaders' monitoring will take place. Leaders share their findings through regular meetings and devise improvement priorities from this work. However, monitoring activity is often not well-focused enough to identify correctly where pupils standards dip, for example in Key Stage 3, or where the provision is not co-ordinated well enough to support pupils to develop and apply their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. On occasions, leaders' monitoring focuses exclusively on provision rather than pupils' progress.

There has been a period of staffing turbulence, but leaders have worked diligently to secure high quality, well-qualified teaching staff. Where they know that examination pupils are at risk of not achieving as well as they might because of temporary staffing arrangements, for example, leaders provide Saturday catch-up sessions or additional 'clinics' for pupils. On the very few occasions where monitoring identifies serious concerns about the quality of classroom practice, leaders address these robustly.

There is a wealth of development plans at faculty and department level, and the headteacher devises an overall school improvement plan. Overall, the breadth of different plans covers too many development points and actions to be manageable. On occasions, priorities across the plans inadvertently conflict with each other, and across the school, different staff identify different overarching priorities. This means that improvement work lacks rigour and cohesion.

Improvement plans lack sufficient detail to ensure that everyone understands the steps needed to bring about improvement, such as the milestones and clear success criteria. Leaders' use of data is currently underdeveloped, and this means that, in many plans, leaders are unclear about why particular issues are a focus for improvement, and what success might look like. On occasions, the priorities do not focus well enough on improving pupils' outcomes.

There are positive and worthwhile professional relationships with parents, who receive worthwhile newsletters and regular reports about their children's progress. Leaders keep abreast of stakeholders' views through the annual, centrally organised 'voice' surveys, that provide a collated version of parents', pupils' and staff views.

Across the school, there are worthwhile professional learning opportunities. These make good use of the proprietor's global networks, in addition to UK and national hubs, to share good practice, ideas and initiatives. Regular and valuable 'Let's talk' performance management arrangements support all staff to improve their practice. Professional learning supports staff to further their own qualifications, for example to Masters level. Furthermore, many staff benefit from examination board training that helps them to deliver well-tailored learning at Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5.

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/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and support staff through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors/proprietor(s), leaders and individual teachers 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
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit lessons and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning
- 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 (where appropriate), information on pupils' well-being, 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 ([Estyn Website](#))

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 publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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