

A report on

Welshpool High School

**Welshpool High School
Salop Road
Welshpool
Powys
SY21 7RE**

Date of inspection: May 2025

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About Welshpool High School

Name of provider	Welshpool High School
Local authority	Powys County Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	789
Pupils of statutory school age	673
Number in sixth form	113
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Secondary is 21.1%)	17.0%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Secondary is 11.2%)	15.5%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	2.8%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	4.2%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2022
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	02/02/2017
Start date of inspection	19/05/2025

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.

Summary

At Welshpool High School, leaders and staff are dedicated to creating a caring environment and supporting pupils' well-being through tailored interventions. The school has a strong safeguarding culture and quickly addresses any issues, which results in most pupils feeling safe in school. The recently revised approach to supporting good behaviour and engagement has successfully reduced low-level disruptions in lessons. Pupils receive helpful guidance and mentoring to support their learning and personal development, with strong arrangements in place to support pupils well-being when they move from primary to secondary education.

Overall, the quality of teaching is too variable. Nearly all teachers possess secure subject knowledge and act as effective language models, establishing warm and supportive relationships with pupils. However, in half of lessons, shortcomings in teaching result in pupils not making the progress they are capable of. Teachers in these lessons often lack high expectations, provide insufficiently challenging activities, and fail to adapt their teaching to support pupils with weaker skills. Teachers, in general, do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills. Additionally, written feedback in a minority of cases lacks precision and does not effectively support improvement.

The school is taking a thoughtful approach to implementing Curriculum for Wales, aiming to improve teaching and encourage collaboration across different learning areas. The curriculum for older pupils is broad and balanced, shaped by pupil voice, and designed to meet their general and vocational goals. However, the level of challenge varies across learning areas, and the tracking and monitoring of pupil progress in younger years is underdeveloped, making it hard for leaders to evaluate the impact of the curriculum and know whether pupils are making suitable progress. In addition, the provision for the progressive development of pupils' skills requires improvement.

Despite leaders' commitment to raising the achievement of all pupils, over time leadership has had insufficient impact on important aspects such as the quality of teaching and skills development. Whilst whole-school attendance is slowly improving, the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals in particular, is of concern. Senior leaders support the headteacher, but their work is not monitored or evaluated well enough. Furthermore, leadership responsibility is not evenly distributed and too often overlaps leading to unclear lines of accountability.

Governors are enthusiastic and committed supporters of the school, beginning to challenge leaders appropriately. The headteacher, together with the business manager and governing body, manages the school's finances carefully, contributing to a significant

reduction of the deficit budget. However, the school's use of pupil development grant (PDG) funding has not always been appropriate and has not had sufficient impact on the attendance and attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals.

Recommendations

We have made five recommendations to help the school continue to improve:

- R1. Strengthen leadership to ensure that roles and responsibilities are equitable and clear and ensure that leaders at all levels evaluate their work accurately and robustly, and secure the improvements required
- R2. Improve the quality of teaching to ensure appropriate challenge for all pupils
- R3. Improve cross-curricular planning to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills progressively
- R4. Improve attendance, in particular that of pupils eligible for free school meals
- R5. Increase the opportunities that pupils have to use Welsh outside of Welsh lessons

What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion, that special measures are required in relation to this school. The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress usually every four to six months.

Main findings

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching varies considerably across the school. In about a half of cases, pupils including those eligible for free school meals and those with additional learning needs (ALN) make at least adequate progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills.

In these lessons, teachers:

- have secure subject knowledge and act as effective language models.
- treat pupils fairly and with respect.
- show enthusiasm for their subject, planning activities that increase in challenge appropriately
- establish a suitable pace of learning, maintaining pupils' interest
- address misconceptions and hold suitable expectations of what pupils can achieve

Most teachers establish warm and supportive relationships with pupils, and many manage pupils' behaviour consistently well. As a result, nearly all pupils respond by being polite and respectful towards visitors, teachers, and their peers, and they are punctual to lessons.

In a very few lessons, teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They plan their lessons creatively to pique pupils' curiosity and encourage them to think for themselves. They question pupils skilfully to probe and extend their understanding. As a result, pupils in these lessons make rapid progress in their subject knowledge and skills.

In around half of lessons, shortcomings in teaching mean that pupils make limited progress. In these lessons, teachers:

- do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve
- plan activities that lack sufficient challenge, particularly for more able pupils
- do not adapt their teaching to support those with weaker skills
- ask mostly closed questions to check pupils' recall
- do not ask questions that probe pupils' thinking in enough depth
- plan activities that keep pupils busy, such as copying from the board or completing wordsearches, rather than supporting their learning
- do not address pupils' misconceptions effectively
- provide lessons where the pace of learning is too slow

A few teachers do not manage pupils' behaviour well enough or ensure that pupils are sufficiently attentive during key parts of the lesson. They do not provide sufficient opportunities for discussion and collaboration. In these cases, pupils tend to be passive. While they are compliant and sit quietly, they do not contribute actively or listen attentively to their teachers. This limits the progress they make.

In a minority of cases, written feedback lacks precision and is not helpful in supporting improvement. In these cases, marking is infrequent or superficial, and errors in literacy often go uncorrected.

The school has begun to identify opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. However, staff have not considered how well these opportunities develop pupils' skills progressively or the impact they have on pupils' progress. This includes reviewing pupils' failure to transfer their learning from discrete skills lessons, which are used when classes are taught by more than one teacher. This lack of robust quality assurance contributes to pupils continuing to benefit from only a narrow range of worthwhile and relevant opportunities to develop and apply their skills.

Around a half of pupils do not listen carefully to their teachers and peers and often miss instructions and information that would support their learning. Staff have benefited from external training to help strengthen pupils' verbal skills but the strategies they have been provided with are not used consistently. A few pupils use a wide range of vocabulary confidently and provide well-developed responses but most offer brief responses and use a more limited vocabulary, both of which frequently remain unaddressed by teachers.

Whilst the school is aware of the importance of reading, overall, a minority of pupils have too few opportunities to read and interpret challenging and lengthy texts to support their understanding of concepts and widen their vocabulary. Many pupils spend a disproportionate amount of time on very basic information retrieval work.

A very few pupils produce well-crafted writing that engages the reader's interest successfully. The writing of around a half is technically secure and shows a clear understanding of purpose and audience. In around a half of cases writing is simplistic, and ideas are expressed poorly. These pupils make frequent basic errors, which in many cases are not identified by teachers. The marking of even basic literacy is underdeveloped across the school and contributes significantly to the continuation of these errors. Too often, pupils are asked to write diaries, blogs e-mails or newspaper articles without any specific requirement to follow the conventions of the respective genres.

Opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy skills across the curriculum are not challenging enough. In a few cases, when pupils are given suitable opportunities in relevant subjects across the curriculum, a majority of pupils draw graphs and represent

data suitably. For example, in science, they construct and plot scatter graphs accurately, adding appropriate lines of best fit. However, too often pupils do not draw graphs accurately or interpret them.

A majority of pupils have a suitable understanding of basic number skills. They use the four rules of number correctly, for example when working with percentages and mean average or when using formulae to calculate the area of a circle. However, too often they rely on shortcuts and use checklists to work out answers and as a result do not develop their understanding of important concepts well enough. This means that frequently they struggle to apply their learning in relevant subjects across the curriculum.

Overall pupils make only modest progress in their ability to communicate in Welsh. While their pronunciation is sound, they have limited vocabulary and are generally unable to construct their own sentences independently.

The school has adopted a reflective and well-considered approach to implementing Curriculum for Wales, with a clear aim to develop pedagogy and promote collaboration across Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs). Leaders have articulated a coherent curriculum vision, shaped through meaningful consultation with pupils, parents, governors, and partner schools. This inclusive vision provides a useful foundation for curriculum planning across the school.

Curriculum design has been approached as an iterative process, allowing time for reflection, professional learning, and refinement. However, the level of challenge is inconsistent across AoLEs.

Staff have worked closely with partner primary schools to improve continuity of learning. Joint professional learning days facilitated useful collaborative construction of progression maps. This helps teachers plan more effectively to build on prior learning for Year 7 pupils.

The tracking and monitoring of pupil progress in younger years is underdeveloped. This limits leaders' ability to evaluate the impact of the curriculum and to ensure that all pupils make adequate progress. While there are examples of well-designed and engaging learning experiences, variability in the quality of curriculum planning and delivery across AoLEs continues to be a challenge.

The curriculum for Years 10 and 11 pupils is broad and balanced. Learning pathways are shaped by pupil voice and designed to reflect pupils' aspirations. For the sixth form, the school enhances its offer through the Chweched Powys 6 consortium. Partnerships with other providers extend the curriculum offer.

A notable feature of the school's work is the support it gives to help pupils consider their next steps. The guidance it offers during key transition points is strong and staff provide personalised advice that helps pupils make informed and aspirational decisions about their future. The school's personal and social education (PSE) programme is particularly effective. Drawing on pupil voice and a range of external expertise, it supports pupils' holistic development of spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness and equips them with the knowledge and confidence to stay safe in a range of contexts. A well-structured work experience programme further enriches the curriculum and prepares pupils effectively for life beyond school.

The school places an emphasis on local identity and the concept of Cynefin, offering pupils opportunities to deepen their appreciation of Welsh heritage and culture, fostering a sense of place and belonging. Although cultural identity is celebrated, the promotion and use of the Welsh language across the broader curriculum are underdeveloped. Opportunities for pupils to use Welsh outside of lessons are limited.

Well-being, care, support and guidance

Leaders and staff at Welshpool High School demonstrate a strong commitment to providing a nurturing environment. They know their pupils well and support their well-being through tailored interventions.

The school has a strong safeguarding culture. Staff understand how and when to report concerns and they respond promptly and thoroughly to any issues raised. They work closely with external partners, such as children's services, the police, and CAMHS, to secure appropriate support for pupils. Leaders have strengthened processes for recruiting staff and the oversight of safeguarding procedures.

The school has implemented a well-structured approach to supporting good behaviour and engagement. The revised approach has successfully reduced low-level disruptions in lessons over the past two years. Staff respond to the very few bullying incidents swiftly and use restorative approaches effectively to help pupils rebuild respectful relationships with each other. As a consequence, most pupils report that they feel safe in school.

The information recorded in behaviour and incident logs and the findings of pupil surveys are used well by staff to inform changes to the curriculum, for example the Relationships and Sexuality and Personal and Social Education curriculum. The school provides a wide range of helpful well-being interventions to support pupils' well-being and progress. While these measures are responsive to pupils' needs, leaders do not consistently or robustly evaluate the effectiveness of interventions.

The school has revised its processes and structures to promote good attendance. There are suitable processes to support pupils with low attendance, including working closely

with external services and parents to address issues quickly through early interventions. Attendance data collected by the school indicates an improvement compared with the same period last year. The number of pupils who are persistently absent has fallen. While school leaders collect and track attendance data to analyse patterns and trends, they do not analyse this information in enough depth to identify which strategies are working and what should be adapted or changed. The attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals in 2023-2024 was below the national average. While attendance is improving slowly, rates of attendance in 2023-2024 remain below pre-pandemic levels.

Staff ensure that pupils receive helpful guidance and mentoring to support their learning and personal development. Pupils benefit from form tutor mentoring, and sixth-form pupils receive subject-specific mentoring to address individual progress needs. Sixth-form pupils also mentor their peers in younger year groups, fostering a sense of responsibility and community. Several staff and pupils are trained as mental health first aiders. Pupils value the Calon provision as a safe space to visit for support for anxiety and other well-being needs.

The school has established strong arrangements to support pupils moving from primary to secondary education. Collaborative work between pastoral leaders, subject staff and primary school staff ensures that pupils are well prepared for this significant change. For example, the music department works extensively with primary school staff and pupils during this phase. Pupils who move to the school from other secondary schools are supported well to settle into their new learning environment.

There are comprehensive arrangements to help pupils make informed decisions regarding their future pathways, beginning in Year 9. This includes a dedicated careers advisor, an annual careers convention involving employers, universities, and further education providers, and regular signposting of a wide range of available training and employment opportunities post-16. Pupils with additional learning needs also receive tailored advice and guidance.

The school encourages pupils to engage actively in school life through participation in a range of leadership opportunities and mentoring schemes. For example, the student council, the school nutrition action group, Criw Cymraeg and the sixth-form leadership group offer pupils valuable opportunities to contribute to decision-making in the school. Pupils feel that their views are listened to and acted upon. For example, the school have made changes to the 'callback' system, which encourages positive behaviour through restorative approaches. Pupils also benefit from a wide range of extracurricular activities encompassing sporting, academic, and cultural pursuits, which they value highly and support their personal development effectively outside of the curriculum.

The school's approach to supporting pupils with ALN is well-structured and aligned with the requirements of Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (ALNET). Processes for identifying pupils with ALN are clear and all relevant pupils have individual development plans (IDPs). One-page profiles outline pupils' needs and strategies for supporting them in lessons suitably. The ALN team provides effective management of IDPs, person-centred reviews, and the deployment of teaching assistants. However, while a range of suitable interventions help pupils develop their literacy, numeracy, and other social and emotional skills, the school does not always rigorously track pupils' progress on these interventions or evaluate their effectiveness robustly.

Leading and improving

The headteacher is committed to supporting the development of well-educated and responsible young people by raising the expectations and achievement of all pupils. He encourages governors, staff and pupils to show care for all and to put the school at the heart of the community. Since his appointment, he has influenced positively a few key areas of the school's work such as strengthening the culture of safeguarding and overseeing more robust financial management. However, leadership within the school has had insufficient impact on other important aspects of the school's work such as the quality of teaching and the progressive development of pupils' skills.

In general, senior leaders offer appropriate support to the headteacher but their work is not monitored or evaluated well enough. This includes their support and challenge for middle leaders in securing improvements to teaching and learning, which is often not timely or effective enough. Leadership responsibilities, including those of the extended leadership team, are broadly appropriate but overlap in areas such as whole-school self-evaluation and improvement planning, and staff well-being. This does not allow for clear lines of accountability. Furthermore, the weight of responsibility across senior and middle leadership is not equitable and a few leaders are overburdened. The extended leadership group offers useful professional learning for staff.

Whole-school priorities are recognised and understood by staff and form a framework for improvement planning. However, overall, they are too broad and lack precision. As a result, leaders do not always set actions that are robust enough to secure sustained improvements in their areas of responsibility.

Leaders' ability to evaluate the progress pupils make is too variable. They do not consider well enough the impact of provision on pupils' learning. They are over-reliant on analysis of data and do not look at the progress pupils make in books and lessons over time. In addition, their evaluations of the quality of provision and the standards pupils achieve are overly positive. This has contributed to the school not making sufficient progress in addressing the recommendations from the previous core inspection.

Processes to manage the performance of teaching and non-teaching staff are generally appropriate, though the objectives agreed are often too broad and do not focus on delivering the priorities of the school precisely enough. This includes completing professional learning activities and developing resources without being clear about the impact desired. The school provides staff with a wide range of opportunities to engage in professional learning. Teachers value the chance to discuss their development needs with line managers and are able to pursue relevant external courses or interests. Staff surveys help shape the professional learning programme and include an appropriate blend of internal and external programmes. Leaders organise useful opportunities for sharing effective practice between departments and individuals. Despite this work, professional learning has not led to sufficient improvements in the overall quality of teaching. This is partly because it is not closely enough aligned to areas for improvement in teaching, which reflects wider shortcomings in the school's self-evaluation processes.

Governors are enthusiastic and committed supporters of the school. Their work as critical friends is developing suitably and they are beginning to challenge leaders appropriately. The headteacher, together with the business manager and governing body now manages the school's finances carefully and this has contributed to a significant reduction of the deficit budget. However, the school's use of PDG funding has not always been appropriate and it has not had sufficient impact on the attendance and attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals. The evaluation of this expenditure for the last academic year is not robust enough.

The school's address of national priorities has been too variable. There has been a steady and considered approach to Curriculum for Wales. A range of appropriate strategies to prevent poverty impacting upon the well-being and achievement of vulnerable pupils is beginning to have a positive impact. However, despite improvements, attendance is too low and opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills remain at an early stage.

Additional information

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not give any cause for concern.

The school has appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking.

The headteacher, together with the business manager and governing body, now manages the school's finances carefully and this has contributed to a significant reduction of the deficit budget. However, the school's use of PDG funding has not always been appropriate and it has not had sufficient impact on the attendance and attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals. The evaluation of this expenditure for the last academic year is not robust enough.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) 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, where appropriate
- visit a broad sample of lessons, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- 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 has 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' 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

Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. ‘*most pupils...*’ or ‘*very few pupils...*’. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

Copies of the report

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

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

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