



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

A report on

**Bishop Hedley High School
Gwaunfarren Road
Penydarren
Merthyr Tydfil
CF47 9AN**

Date of inspection: November 2018

by

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

About Bishop Hedley High School

Bishop Hedley Catholic High School is an 11-16 comprehensive school in Merthyr Tydfil. There are 519 pupils on roll. These figures are slightly lower than at the time of the previous core inspection, as the school no longer has a sixth form. The school was last inspected in 2013.

The school receives pupils mostly from seven associated Catholic primary schools. These schools cover a wide area including Merthyr Tydfil, Merthyr Vale, Gurnos, Hirwaun, Aberdare, Ebbw Vale, Brynmawr, Tredegar and Rhymney. The school welcomes pupils of all faiths and those with no faith background.

The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is 20.6%, which is above the national average of 16.4% for secondary schools. The school has about 26% of pupils on the special educational needs register, which is higher than the national average of 22.9% for secondary schools. About 1% of pupils have a statement of special educational needs, which is lower than the national average of 2.2%.

Around 29% of pupils come from minority ethnic groups and about 27% of pupils come from homes where English is not the first language. Almost no pupils speak Welsh at home.

The interim headteacher took up post in 2018. There is an interim deputy headteacher, and three assistant headteachers.

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

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

Bishop Hedley Catholic High School successfully fulfils its aims of encouraging and educating its pupils in an extremely caring and inclusive Christian ethos. Pupils are proud to be members of the school, they engage positively with their learning and behave exceptionally well. They make strong progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills, and the standards that they reach overall are well above expectations. Pupils also develop strong social skills and they have a particularly mature understanding and respect for people from other backgrounds, faiths and traditions.

Leaders and staff provide strong direction and support for the achievement of high standards and the exceptional level of care, support and guidance for pupils. The overall quality of teaching is consistently effective, as is the overall learning experience. The valuable and extensive programme of professional learning activities successfully promotes the school as a strong learning community, for both pupils and staff.

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

Recommendations

- R1 Improve the impact of teacher feedback to pupils
- R2 Strengthen the provision to develop pupils' ICT, numeracy and Welsh language skills in meaningful contexts across the curriculum
- R3 Ensure that all improvement processes focus consistently on the impact of teaching and pupil outcomes

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection. Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on its work in relation to care, support and guidance, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main findings

Standards: Excellent

The standards reached by pupils overall at Bishop Hedley High School are well above expectations.

Most pupils are competent, eager learners. As they move through the school, they make strong progress in developing their understanding, knowledge and skills across the range of subjects. In a few subject areas, pupils make exceptional progress.

In lessons, most pupils have a clear understanding about the purpose of their work and how the concepts from the previous lesson underpin their current learning. Many pupils recall key subject facts quickly and accurately, and apply them confidently in wider contexts and new situations.

Most pupils make at least strong progress in developing their literacy skills. They are extremely considerate listeners. For example, pupils listen carefully when sharing their grasp of different definitions about the Holocaust and explore sensitively why some people might object to this term. Many pupils talk confidently and think carefully about their answers and who they are speaking to, showing considerable feeling and understanding of the context. They use a rich extended vocabulary with a broad range of subject specific terms to explain their ideas clearly.

As they move through the school, most pupils make strong progress in developing their reading skills. They understand a range of texts and select the essential points from them appropriately. For example, in geography, pupils scan written articles and accompanying tables showing maximum and minimum temperatures in cities to locate those with the highest and lowest temperatures, and those with the greatest difference. Where appropriate, many pupils are able to deduce and infer meaning from texts and select relevant information to support their views. In English, for example, pupils draw inferences about the character and nature of Miss Havisham's life from selected extracts of the text. More able pupils select, synthesise and compare information from a variety of sources particularly well.

Most pupils make strong progress in developing their writing skills in subjects across the curriculum. They write well for a range of different purposes, largely with suitable structure and form. For example, in English, pupils write effective persuasive letters such as to the Education Cabinet Secretary advocating the importance of physical education in schools. They use appropriate sentence and paragraph structures, and beneficial techniques such as rhetoric and anecdotes. Older pupils also have a secure understanding of the impact of literary devices such as when annotating Owen Sheers' poetry to identify words evoking imagery. In different subjects, many pupils write well-constructed pieces using a wide range of language effectively.

Most pupils develop strong numeracy skills during their mathematics lessons. For example, younger pupils make quick and mostly accurate mental calculations of simple percentages. As they progress through the school, pupils increasingly transfer the numeracy skills that they have learnt in their mathematics lessons to a range of contexts effectively. This includes in history, where most pupils interpret

population growth bar charts correctly and give reasons for the trends identified. In science, many pupils use their knowledge of mathematical equations aptly to apply scientific formula such as Ohm's law to calculate resistance. A few pupils are not secure enough in their number skills and do not use suitable methods to check if their answer is correct.

As they progress through the school, pupils acquire a useful range of skills and knowledge in information communication technology (ICT). Most pupils develop secure skills in word processing and the use of basic graphics for presentation. By the end of key stage 4, many pupils are competent in their use of more advanced ICT applications, but make limited use of these skills in their work across the curriculum.

Pupils' performance at the end of key stage 4 is of a high standard. For the last four years, performance in the level 2 threshold, including English and mathematics compares favourably with that of similar schools. In each of these years, the school's performance in the capped points score has been above expectations and consistently above that in similar schools. For each of the last four years, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades at A*-A or equivalent at GCSE has been particularly strong compared with levels in similar schools.

Over the last four years, the performance of boys, girls and pupils eligible for free school meals compares well with that of the same groups of pupils in similar schools. Nearly all pupils with additional learning needs make strong progress. Those with English as an additional language develop both their English skills and subject knowledge exceptionally well.

For the last four years, no pupil has left school without a recognised qualification.

At key stage 4, over the last four years, the majority of pupils achieved a level 2 GCSE qualification in Welsh.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Excellent

Pupils are proud to be members of the school and thrive and excel in the caring and supportive ethos that permeates the community.

Almost all pupils behave exceptionally well around the school and in lessons, treating each other with respect. As a result, bullying incidents are rare. Most pupils have strong social skills and express themselves maturely when conversing with adults. They develop trusting working relationships with staff and this means that they know who they can turn to for support and advice for their wellbeing and for their work.

During lessons, nearly all pupils engage positively with their learning. They are quick to settle to their work, show interest and sustain their concentration well. When working in pairs and small groups to share ideas or complete tasks and solve problems, they are polite and respectful to each other. They know how and when to involve others and they are eager to find solutions together and share success. For example, younger pupils work enthusiastically in pairs in gymnastics to help each other achieve control in basic agilities such as straddle or forward rolls. Many pupils work well independently for sustained periods and maintain their focus when facing unfamiliar and challenging work.

Almost all pupils develop successfully as ethical and compassionate citizens and they have a particularly mature understanding and respect for people from other backgrounds, faiths and traditions. They also show considerable respect for their learning environment, which includes rarely dropping litter. Almost all pupils participate keenly in a range of charitable enterprises, enhancing their appreciation of local and international concerns. Their participation is most notable through the annual 'Lenten Challenge', where each form devises a way of raising money for a charity of their choosing.

Most pupils have a strong awareness and understanding of healthy living and emotional wellbeing. They respond positively to advice and guidance on aspects such as e-safety, diet, exercise and relationships. Many use their time constructively out of lessons, through engagement in a wide range of sporting and extra-curricular clubs. They also engage enthusiastically in the school's annual 'Enrichment Programme', where they develop important life skills, such as team working, leadership and perseverance.

Members of the 'school parliament' are highly motivated and eager to influence the school's work appropriately. For example, they have helped to devise the school's behaviour policy and Year 11 uniform. Many pupils also develop their leadership skills effectively through extra-curricular activities, leading assemblies and as prefects in Year 11.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

The quality of teaching and learning experiences makes a significant contribution to the standards pupils achieve, their personal development and their high levels of wellbeing. Teaching across the school is characterised by particularly supportive working relationships between staff and pupils that engage pupils' interests, raise aspirations and help build their self-confidence and self-esteem.

In most lessons, teachers have clear aims and objectives that include a consistent focus on developing pupils' communication skills. Many have extensive subject expertise that they use well, for example, to explore new topics in a variety of ways and to challenge pupils to deepen their knowledge and understanding. In many cases, teachers' high expectations, a range of progressively challenging tasks and engaging resources assist pupils to build successfully on their earlier learning. Many teachers provide clear explanations and use questioning well to help pupils develop an understanding of particular themes and new concepts. For example, they explain to pupils how to recognise the critical features of effective writing in a range of writing forms in French or how to create space and retain possession in football.

In a minority of instances, where teaching is particularly effective, teachers use probing questioning to ensure pupils think carefully to provide precise and extended responses. These teachers plan skilfully to ensure activities challenge pupils of differing abilities effectively, for example through testing extension tasks or all pupils making a particular contribution such as to a class ensemble in music. Where teaching is most successful, this is because teachers convey an obvious passion and love for their subject, which helps enthuse pupils, capture their imagination and inspire their learning.

In a few cases, learning activities do not challenge or support pupils of differing abilities well enough. For example, activities are not structured suitably or pupils do not have appropriate opportunities to explore, share and develop their ideas and understanding. Consequently, pupils are either insufficiently stretched or find tasks too difficult.

In most lessons, teachers provide helpful verbal feedback to pupils that assists them to progress in their learning. Following the completion of specific assessed tasks, many teachers give pupils constructive advice that relates directly to success criteria and helps pupils to understand how they can improve the quality of their work. In a minority of cases, for example when analysing an exemplar response, peer assessment based on clear criteria is used well to reinforce key concepts. However, across the school there is too much inconsistency in the effectiveness of teacher feedback such as ensuring pupils respond constructively to teachers' comments, for example by refining and improving written accounts.

The school provides a suitably balanced curriculum that builds well on pupils' previous learning and meets the needs of pupils of all abilities. At key stage 3, worthwhile transition activities contribute suitably to continuity in pupils' learning experiences as well as supporting their wellbeing. As part of its involvement as a curriculum pioneer, at key stage 3 the school is implementing a thematic and investigative approach to learning with a particular emphasis on developing a broad range of skills and personal qualities. This contributes usefully to a deeper exploration of specific topics, such as 'Whose world is it anyway?' At key stage 4, pupils have beneficial opportunities to obtain relevant qualifications in a suitable range of GCSE and vocational courses.

There is an extensive range of sporting, cultural, artistic and academic trips, including participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics' events, visits to the theatre, the Senedd and Houses of Parliament. Together with a structured enrichment programme, these activities help broaden pupils' experiences, support their learning and contribute successfully to their personal development. Overall, the courses, qualifications and wider learning experiences the school provides have a strong impact on pupils' outcomes and prepare them well for further education and their future careers.

The school is implementing a beneficial range of strategies and initiatives to support the development of pupils' skills. These approaches include targeted intervention programmes that help pupils with underdeveloped literacy and numeracy skills to make strong progress. There is a particular focus on supporting pupils to read more regularly and to write well for a range of purposes using ambitious vocabulary and a variety of literary devices.

The school has identified relevant opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy skills in meaningful contexts other than mathematics. The co-ordination of this area across the curriculum is at an early stage, as is the use of pupils' ICT skills in different subjects. Strategies and initiatives to improve pupils' Welsh language skills are having limited impact, with pupils having few opportunities to practise their Welsh language skills outside of Welsh lessons.

Care, support and guidance: Excellent

The school is a very close-knit, inclusive community that provides high quality care, support and guidance for its pupils. It has an extremely caring and supportive ethos that promotes pupils' wellbeing and attitudes to learning very effectively. Staff know their pupils extremely well and have a holistic approach towards supporting their personal development and achieving their full potential. The valuable support they provide both in the classroom and beyond is particularly sensitive to pupils' individual needs. This approach helps pupils to develop confidence, engage positively with their learning and achieve high outcomes.

The school successfully ensures that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is inherent in all aspects of school life. For example, whole-school assemblies, tutorial periods and visiting speakers enhance pupils' understanding of their culture and sense of community, and encourage them to reflect on their personal values and responsibilities. The Christian ethos and practices of the school also help pupils to develop their spiritual and moral understanding exceptionally well.

The school has high quality arrangements for tracking and monitoring pupils' progress. Leaders monitor the academic progress of individuals and groups of pupils across each key stage closely. They use this information beneficially to identify pupils at risk of underperformance and to provide a valuable range of interventions and mentoring strategies to meet their needs. Attendance data is also monitored rigorously, and appropriate support is provided for pupils whose attendance is causing concern. Good attendance and progress are promoted through rewards such as letters to parents and prizes. These strategies have been successful in sustaining high attendance levels and reducing persistent absence significantly over the last four years.

Pupils with additional learning needs, including those who have English as an additional language, are provided with valuable and well-co-ordinated support by the school's inclusion department. These pupils are supported beneficially by a small team of committed support staff who provide effective individual and small-group interventions. Staff evaluate the progress of these pupils robustly. Each pupil's individual development plan contains relevant short term objectives to address literacy, numeracy or behaviour and social needs. These plans do not always provide sufficient information or are accessible enough to inform planning for lessons suitably. The school works closely and successfully with a range of outside agencies, such as the educational psychology service, mental health services, school nurses teams, social services and police community liaison officers to benefit pupils.

At key stage 3, the school implements a suitable personal and social education programme. This programme focuses on a range of age-appropriate topics which are beneficial to pupils' personal development. The programme is extended throughout the school by the annual whole-school 'Enrichment Programme'. Activities include workshops on language, wellbeing, critical thinking and visits such as to an outdoor pursuit centre and London theatres. This programme is particularly effective in developing pupils' social skills by challenging their thinking and developing greater understanding of the importance of tolerance, respect for others and celebrating diversity.

Pupils have valuable opportunities to learn how to become active citizens. For example, the school's strong emphasis on thinking about others less fortunate than themselves is evident in the large number of charity events pupils hold. The lively

'school parliament' and other leadership roles such as mentors and prefects also provide useful opportunities for pupils to learn about the importance of participation, responsibility and accountability.

The school has suitable arrangements for promoting healthy lifestyles. For example, the revised menu in the school canteen provides appropriate arrangements for healthy eating and drinking, and there is a range of relevant extra-curricular sports for pupils to participate in.

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

Leadership and management: Good

The headteacher and senior leaders have established a clear vision for the school with appropriate strategic aims that focus on meeting the needs of all pupils. Based on the mission statement: 'Educate, Encourage, Excel in Christ', leaders successfully promote an extremely caring and inclusive community. Their vision is shared effectively with the full school community. As a result, pupils, staff, governors and parents all promote the same Christian values. This helps maintain pupils' exceptional attitudes towards their learning and makes a significant contribution to the high standards that they achieve.

The school's effective succession planning and distributed leadership ensure that the interim headteacher and her senior team continue to reinforce the school's values actively. The roles and responsibilities of leaders are clearly defined and there is a coherent and appropriate allocation of responsibilities. The effective cycle of meetings at all levels ensures that communication across the school is clear and improvement priorities are understood by all.

Leaders at all levels gather and analyse first-hand evidence effectively to evaluate pupil performance, subject outcomes and pastoral matters such as attendance. This robust analysis has made a positive contribution to important areas of the school's work such as reducing persistent absenteeism. Leaders also make beneficial use of broader evidence, including findings from lesson observations and the scrutiny of pupils' work, as well as data from examination reports, to understand what does or does not work well. However, a few middle leaders do not use the whole range of data effectively enough to evaluate performance and plan for improvement.

Generally, leaders are clear regarding the strengths and weaknesses of their areas of responsibilities, and they know what needs to be done to secure improvement. However, in a few instances leaders do not focus closely enough on the impact of teaching on pupil progress when carrying out lesson observations or the scrutiny of pupils' work. As a result, a few leaders have been less effective in improving the quality of teaching and standards within their departments.

Leaders have been successful in promoting a culture that promotes and values professional learning. Staff benefit from an extensive range of professional learning activities, which includes peer observations to explore effective practice and different or innovative approaches to teaching and learning. The school has also developed a wide range of beneficial links with other providers, including local schools, higher

education institutions and the regional consortium. For example, it has worked successfully to develop and lead a series of teaching and learning and leadership programmes for the region. These type of opportunities, and the scope to apply for 'shadow' leadership posts within the school, support the development of aspiring leaders exceptionally well. This aspect of the school's provision is a considerable strength.

Leaders carry out their roles and responsibilities mostly well. Lines of accountability are clear and there are regular review meetings to monitor progress against departmental and whole-school targets. However, in a few instances, line management and monitoring activities are not rigorous enough, including ensuring that identified actions are revisited with staff.

The school uses its performance management processes well to support whole-school, departmental and individual priorities and needs. Where appropriate, under-performance is dealt with sensitively and firmly.

Members of the governing body are committed and loyal, and they protect the school's interests carefully. They have a secure understanding of their roles and are informed appropriately about the school's performance. The governing body provides an appropriate sense of direction for the school's work and is effective as a critical friend.

The school's business manager, working together with the headteacher and governors, manages the school's finances wisely. All expenditure is budgeted tightly and allocated to identified priorities. These priorities includes suitable use of grant funding such as the Pupil Development Grant to support vulnerable pupils and improve their outcomes. Over the last five years, despite the closure of the sixth form and further deterioration in the fabric of the buildings, the school has monitored its budget extremely prudently to achieve a small reserve. This reserve is spent astutely, including maintaining the challenging school site under difficult financial circumstances for the benefit of all.

Copies of the report

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

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

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

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

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

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