



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

**A report on**

**The Cathedral School  
Cardiff Road  
Llandaff  
CF5 2YH**

**Date of inspection: September 2018**

**by**

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

## About The Cathedral School

The Cathedral School is an independent day school for boys and girls from 3 to 18 years of age. The school is close to Llandaff Cathedral in the city of Cardiff. It was founded in 1880 and has been owned since 1957 by the Woodard Corporation, an educational charity. The school describes itself as an Anglican choir school. It has a close relationship with Llandaff Cathedral, and provides choristers (boys) and choral scholars (girls) to support the Cathedral's choral tradition.

There are currently 807 pupils on roll. These include 33 pupils in the nursery and 341 in the primary section of the school. In the secondary section, there are 466 pupils including 115 in the sixth form. Just over 60% of pupils in both sections of the school are boys.

Most pupils live in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan, but a few come from further afield, such as Llanelli, Merthyr Tydfil, Caerphilly and Newport. About 16% of pupils come from minority ethnic groups. All pupils speak English fluently and very few pupils speak Welsh as their first language. There are a few pupils in the primary section who speak English as an additional language. The language of instruction at the school is English. Welsh is not a compulsory part of the school's curriculum, but a few pupils study Welsh in key stage 4. The school offers additional learning support to about 9% of pupils, mainly to support their literacy development or general learning difficulties.

Pupils join the nursery in the September following their third birthday and there is no testing to secure a place. From reception to Year 6, pupils join the school on the basis of an informal assessment as part of a trial day or part day. The school offers admission to the senior section for all Year 6 pupils currently at the school. New pupils who wish to join the school from Year 7 onwards undertake a formal assessment and the offer of a place is dependent on pupils' attainment. Applicants for a place in the sixth form are required to meet basic minimum entry standards.

The school describes its ethos and aims as 'to give all young people every opportunity to flourish and to become world class learners, within a nurturing and supportive community' and 'to provide first-class education in an actively Christian environment'.

The school has undergone significant developments since the last inspection. These include the opening of a sixth form in September 2013 as well as additions to the premises and accommodation for both the primary and secondary sections of the school. There have also been significant changes to the leadership team. The current head took up her post in September 2016. The restructured leadership team includes the bursar, two deputy heads and three assistant heads, as well as the head of the primary section and the head of sixth form.

## Summary

The standards achieved by pupils at The Cathedral School are extremely high. Over time, the high quality of teaching and the engaging curriculum build systematically and extremely effectively on pupils' knowledge and skills. Together, these enable nearly all pupils to become confident, ambitious, aspirational and well-informed learners. There is an extensive and particularly well-supported programme of co-curricular activities and trips that extends and enhances pupils' learning and contributes particularly successfully to their personal and social development.

The school provides high-quality care, support and guidance for its pupils. Throughout the school, most pupils have extremely positive attitudes to their learning, develop mature social and life skills and make outstanding progress as a result.

The head, senior leaders and the governing body have ensured strong and sustained progress across many aspects of school life over the last few years. This includes the establishment and rapid expansion of a highly-successful sixth form. These developments have contributed to the outstanding standards that pupils achieve and their extremely high levels of wellbeing.

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

| <b>Inspection area</b>                     | <b>Judgement</b> |
|--|------------------|
| <b>Standards</b>                           | <b>Excellent</b> |
| <b>Wellbeing and attitudes to learning</b> | <b>Excellent</b> |
| <b>Teaching and learning experiences</b>   | <b>Excellent</b> |
| <b>Care, support and guidance</b>          | <b>Excellent</b> |
| <b>Leadership and management</b>           | <b>Excellent</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 Increase opportunities for pupils to contribute to the school's strategic initiatives

## **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 a case study for dissemination on Estyn's website on its work in relation to the impact of the school's care, support and guidance arrangements. In particular, the case study will outline the highly effective strategies for promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and the impact these strategies have on pupils' wellbeing and the day-to-day life of the school. These approaches foster values such as respect, tolerance, kindness and compassion, which permeate across the whole school community, and help pupils to develop self-confidence, acquire a broad range of important life skills and to become well-informed and active citizens.

## Main findings

### Standards: Excellent

The standards achieved by pupils at The Cathedral School are extremely high. Many pupils recall earlier learning particularly well and make strong progress in improving their skills and applying their understanding of key principles and concepts to new contexts.

Across the school, most pupils listen attentively to teachers' explanations and the opinions of others. A minority ask thoughtful and pertinent questions to extend their understanding or to challenge particular views. Most reception pupils develop their speaking skills to a high level. In the primary section of the school, most pupils express their ideas clearly and confidently using a wide vocabulary. Many pupils in the senior section are exceptionally confident and highly articulate. The majority have a rich vocabulary and speak with suitable emphasis to present their ideas.

Most pupils in the primary section read particularly well in relation to their chronological age. Younger pupils acquire a good phonic knowledge and use sensible strategies such as using the context of the text to work out the meaning of new words. Most pupils in key stage 2 read aloud fluently and with effective expression. They identify thoughtfully why an author might use specific literary devices for impact and to enhance the readers' experiences. Most pupils respond intelligently to comprehension exercises about novels such as 'Goodnight Mr Tom' and 'The Wizard of Earthensea' applying their skills of inference and deduction confidently.

In the senior section, nearly all pupils read effectively using a range of suitable strategies to retrieve and organise information and to structure their written responses. Many are developing particularly well their ability to analyse the use and impact of language. For example, they draw relevant inferences from 'Pride and Prejudice' to explore gender stereotypes and consider the relationship of Mr and Mrs Bennet. Similarly, in considering extracts from the novels of Arthur Conan Doyle, they evaluate effectively aspects of the personalities and relationship between Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson.

By Year 2, most pupils write effectively in full sentences, using a good range of sentence structures. A few pupils need support to make their sentences interesting. In key stage 2, many pupils write with appropriate technical accuracy for their age. By the end of this key stage, many use a wide vocabulary in their writing and employ figurative language well to create effect. In the senior section, many pupils write effectively for a range of purposes, showing appreciation of audience and purpose. For example, in English they produce persuasive formal letters promoting a particular product or business proposal for the television programme 'Dragons' Den'. Many write well-structured and organised accounts with detailed analysis and thoughtful, informed conclusions, for example when contrasting the lives of the rich and poor in Elizabethan England. In their creative writing, many pupils use a rich vocabulary and employ a range of language techniques successfully, for example to imitate Gothic tone and imagery, capturing the atmosphere of the genre particularly effectively.

In the sixth form, many pupils enjoy opportunities to investigate open-ended questions and contribute to class or group discussions. They express their views clearly and cogently using sophisticated language and relevant technical terms. For example, many pupils use their prior learning and secure understanding of the historical context of the October Revolution in Russia extremely effectively to analyse, evaluate and compare the validity of particular sources.

Pupils in the primary section develop their mathematical skills particularly well. By the end of key stage 2, in relation to their age, many pupils are skilful mathematicians with a high level of achievement. They build well on these skills when they progress to the senior section and become fluent in number and numerical reasoning. Older pupils apply their numerical understanding and skills effectively to support their learning in several other subjects. For example, in science, almost all Year 10 pupils employ their measuring skills competently when using a photometer to measure the rate of transpiration in plants. In addition, many Year 11 pupils write balanced symbol equations ably for the combustion of particular chemical compounds. These pupils' mental calculations, and problem-solving skills, are quick and almost always accurate.

Pupils make strong progress over time and performance at the end of key stage 4 is exceptional. In each of the last three years, nearly all pupils achieved the level 2 threshold (equivalent to five GCSEs at grades A\* to C) and most achieved the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics. Over the same period, more than 60% of all GCSE entries were at grades A\*/A (or equivalent). The proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A\*/A (or equivalent) at GCSE is also extremely high. These outcomes are well above the national average and in line with the highest performing schools in Wales. Performance in the core subjects greatly exceeded national averages in each of the last three years.

For the last three years, no pupil has left the school without a recognised qualification. At the end of Year 11, nearly all pupils remain in full-time education. Most pupils with additional learning needs make strong progress from their individual starting points.

In the sixth form, pupils' performance at A level over the last three years is outstanding. During this time, around half of all A level grades were A\*/A, and more than 70% of entries were at grades A\*-B. In each of the last three years, around 30% of pupils achieved three A level passes at grades A\* or A. These outcomes are well above national averages. At the end of Year 13, almost all pupils progress to higher education.

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

Pupils throughout the school exhibit particularly high levels of wellbeing. Nearly all pupils feel safe and well cared for. Throughout the school, most pupils have extremely positive attitudes to their learning, develop mature social and life skills and make outstanding progress as a result.

The behaviour of nearly all pupils during lessons and around the school is exemplary. They are extremely polite and courteous to each other, to staff and visitors. Most pupils are highly supportive of each other and contribute greatly to promoting the

school's ethos of respect and its kindness agenda. For example, pupils and staff in all sections of the school recognise acts of kindness and celebrate them with others on a weekly basis.

Most pupils participate enthusiastically in the wide range of learning opportunities they experience, and develop increasing confidence as ambitious, independent learners. The majority of pupils engage particularly effectively with new and unfamiliar ideas. For example, at key stage 2, through the 'big science question', pupils ask imaginative and thought-provoking questions about the world around them. In the senior section, pupils regularly lead classroom discussions about how they solve specific problems. Most pupils are eager to share their ideas and knowledge, and readily challenge each other when they think that they might have a better idea or that answers might be wrong. They do so in a polite and often good-humoured way, to which other pupils respond positively. Many pupils demonstrate a curiosity in their learning, a tenacity in overcoming challenges, and fully understand that errors are useful learning opportunities.

Pupils take great pride in their school. There is a strong sense of community, in which almost all pupils contribute constructively to the life of the school. They take responsibility for their own wellbeing and that of others, for example through the caring and enriching house and pastoral structures. Pupils understand the importance of staying safe and know who to talk to if they have a concern. They are confident that the school deals with any concerns effectively.

Many pupils develop valuable leadership skills through their involvement in a worthwhile range of roles and responsibilities, which they undertake enthusiastically. For example, in the primary section 'Healthy Snack Shack' monitors encourage other pupils to eat healthily. In the senior section, pupils have recently established a 'STEM Society' to promote greater awareness and increased application of science, technology, engineering and mathematics in society. The participation of a high proportion of pupils in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme and the Head's Award Scheme for key stage 3 pupils helps them to develop their confidence, resilience and other valuable life skills.

Most pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of their role as global citizens. They have strong spiritual and moral awareness of the responsibilities that they hold for themselves, others and the environment. They take these responsibilities seriously. For example, the eco warriors' activities to promote sustainability include organising a beach clean-up.

From a young age, most pupils develop a particularly strong understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles such as the need for physical exercise. Nearly all pupils participate regularly in the wide range of sporting clubs and recreational activities the school offers, from tap dancing through to team sports. Many pupils also engage enthusiastically in orchestral, choral, cultural and creative activities. Their performance is often to the highest standards such as when performing in regular concerts and services for the public at Llandaff Cathedral.

### **Teaching and learning experiences: Excellent**

The school provides a curriculum that is broad and balanced and meets the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. The curriculum builds systematically and extremely effectively on pupils' knowledge and skills as they move

through the school, to enable nearly all pupils to become confident, ambitious, aspirational and well-informed learners.

In the primary section, the cohesive topic-based curriculum excites and engages early years and key stage 1 pupils particularly well. The stimulating environment and learning experiences contribute extremely effectively to the development of pupils' confidence, self-discipline and personal organisation skills. In the nursery and reception classes, staff make extensive use of the outdoor learning environment to promote pupils' independence, curiosity and wellbeing, in addition to their early reading, writing and counting skills. All infant pupils have worthwhile opportunities to enjoy learning outdoors in the forest school provision.

At key stage 2, discrete subject-based lessons enable pupils to benefit from valuable opportunities for specialist teaching and facilities, for example for drama, modern foreign languages, music and science.

In the senior section, there is a worthwhile range of options at A level and at GCSE, including three modern foreign languages and Latin, that provide valuable and challenging learning experiences for all pupils. The rich curriculum across the school ensures that pupils enjoy their work, and are ready for the challenges and high expectations of learning.

Across the school, there is a strong and cohesive emphasis on developing pupils' language skills and their mathematical skills, purposefully and progressively. Pupils have particularly good opportunities in most lessons to develop their thinking and problem-solving skills as well as their ability to learn independently. As a result, most pupils are equipped with the skills they need to enable them to progress to the next stage of their education and contribute confidently and successfully in the workplace and the wider community.

There is an extensive and particularly well-supported programme of co-curricular activities and trips that extends and enhances pupils' learning and contributes particularly successfully to their personal and social development. This programme includes the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme and the particularly beneficial Head's Award Scheme for key stage 3 pupils as well as a broad range of musical and choral activities and many sporting, recreational, drama, arts and cultural opportunities. The school organises many valuable educational visits and residential experiences. These include field trips, skiing holidays, sports events and tours, choristers' tours, and an exchange visit to Barcelona.

Over time, the high quality of teaching is central to pupils' strong and sustained progress. Many teachers have outstanding subject knowledge, and convey their passion and enthusiasm for their subject areas, which in turn inspires their pupils. Nearly all teachers have high expectations of pupils' attitudes and behaviour. As a result, there are strong, productive working relationships and an atmosphere of mutual respect between the pupils and their teachers.

Teachers plan the objectives for their lessons carefully. They provide clear explanations for their pupils, for example to illustrate the benefits of using isometric paper to construct three-dimensional representations. In nearly all cases, learning proceeds at a good pace. Teachers allow sufficient time for pupils to complete a task with a sense of urgency, but not long enough to lose interest or concentration.

Most teachers have strong questioning skills, which they use exceptionally well to probe pupils' understanding and promote worthwhile discussion. They target their questions precisely, to assess pupils' learning and ensure that the work meets the needs of pupils of differing abilities.

On a very few occasions, tasks do not challenge individual pupils well enough or provide enough opportunities for pupils to try things for themselves, and learn from getting things wrong.

Nearly all teachers provide extremely helpful verbal and written feedback to their pupils, in order to help them to improve. Most pupils make good use of their teachers' advice and guidance.

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

The school provides high-quality care, support and guidance for its pupils. Committed staff contribute exceptional levels of support within and beyond the classroom to help pupils to develop self-confidence and important life skills such as self-reliance. These skills enable pupils to extend their interests, broaden their experiences and deepen their knowledge extremely well. This has a particularly positive impact on pupils' performance and wellbeing.

Leaders have developed robust tracking procedures that enable staff to monitor closely pupils' progress measured against ambitious targets for achievement. Class and subject teachers carry out pupil assessments frequently. They review grades for attitude and progress routinely with pupils and share these with parents. As a result, staff are able to take prompt action, where appropriate, to support those pupils who are not making suitable progress.

The school also uses data from the tracking system rigorously to analyse the performance of different groups of pupils, such as those with additional learning needs. Pupil data from assessments, including standardised tests in reading, spelling and numeracy are tracked from the primary section onwards to identify those pupils who have any specific learning needs. Where appropriate, the school arranges further diagnostic assessments to be undertaken to provide fuller evidence about a pupil's particular barriers to learning. Staff use this information effectively to organise high-quality support and intervention. The additional learning needs co-ordinator liaises well with staff across the school to devise bespoke individual education plans. The detailed plans outline strategies for learning or particular interventions tailored to meet the needs of these individual pupils. Staff use these plans effectively when preparing suitable tasks for these pupils. The school also works closely with external specialists, such as educational psychologists or occupational therapists, if required.

There are extensive arrangements for promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Almost all pupils develop strong spiritual awareness from the school's Christian ethos, participation in assemblies, prayers and services in the school chapel, and from the extremely close links with Llandaff Cathedral. The school's 'thought for the week' also helps to promote an inclusive community where pupils' opinions are valued whatever their faith or view. Overall, this provision has a positive impact on pupils' behaviour and in fostering values such as respect, tolerance, kindness and compassion, which permeate across the whole school community.

The revised personal, health and moral education programme in each section of the school also makes a valuable contribution to pupils' personal development. As they progress through the school, the programme focuses on age-appropriate topics to help pupils prepare for the opportunities, responsibilities and choices they will encounter ahead. Several guest speakers provide useful support to the programme. These include specialists such as the local police community support officer talking with the reception class about 'people who help us', and a nutritionist discussing healthy eating with sixth form pupils. The contribution from these specialists, as well as from the whole programme and wide range of recreational and sporting activities offered by the school encourages pupils to make healthy lifestyle choices effectively.

There are many valuable opportunities for pupils to contribute to the school and wider community, and to become active citizens. From an early age, pupils are encouraged to undertake responsibilities that help them to influence and improve the day-to-day working of the school. For example, pupils in the primary section fulfil their responsibilities as playground buddies with a strong sense of compassion and purpose. Pupils in the senior section receive suitable training to become 'Llandaff listeners', a peer support group that provides helpful assistance to others. Specific roles such as representatives on the pupil forum and the 'senior 10' sixth formers, who meet with the head weekly, provide useful opportunities for pupils to express their views and influence the daily life of the school. This includes a pupil-led initiative to establish 'Project Rainbow', which helps to promote inclusion and diversity effectively.

Across the school, pupils are able to access a valuable range of specialist advice and guidance. For example, Year 11 and sixth form pupils benefit from a careers education programme that includes psychometric profiling, one-to-one careers advice and external practitioner mentoring. The school also provides specialist services from its nursing staff and offers a counselling service to support pupils' emotional wellbeing.

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

### **Leadership and management: Excellent**

The head, senior leaders and the governing body have ensured strong and sustained progress across many aspects of school life over the last few years. This includes the establishment and rapid expansion of a highly-successful sixth form, and major extensions and improvements to the premises and the accommodation. These developments have contributed to the outstanding standards that pupils achieve and their extremely high levels of wellbeing. Leaders and governors have a clear strategic vision for continued future development that is shared by all stakeholders and underpins the ethos of improvement that permeates the school.

The implementation of a revised and extended management structure that includes a strong team of middle leaders provides clear direction and sets out high expectations for all aspects of the school's work. These arrangements secure accountability successfully at all levels. This enables the school to be responsive to new ideas, concerns or issues that may arise. For example, in response to parental observations, leaders introduced a comprehensive personal development programme to raise levels of pupil wellbeing effectively.

The school's appraisal arrangements and related staff objectives are effective in bringing about improvements, for example in managing the demands of homework on pupils. These arrangements have also contributed to better profiling of pupils, which ensures that the school meets their individual needs successfully. Staff professional development priorities are identified usefully through appraisal. Where relevant, staff have valuable opportunities to undertake further study, for example through following relevant higher education courses. This supports their professional practice and career aspirations well and contributes to excellent pupil outcomes.

Staff work well together as a cohesive team. They receive extensive support and an appropriate degree of challenge in a vibrant environment to achieve commonly agreed goals. For example, triad-working to undertake peer lesson observations promotes beneficially the sharing of effective practice in teaching and learning across the school.

Members of the governing body provide strong strategic direction for the school's work. Governors are well-informed about the school's performance and have an extensive set of skills that they apply to both support and challenge the school successfully. For example, governors challenged the school to improve mentoring arrangements to support further pupils' aspirations for university entrance.

Senior leaders have introduced robust quality assurance arrangement to identify the school's strengths and areas for development, for example through learning reviews at primary level and faculty reviews in the senior section. These activities form the bedrock of whole-school self-evaluation, which in turn, informs the school's priorities for development. The process is highly effective in driving initiatives in teaching and learning. For instance, staff have introduced effective strategies to improve pupils' spelling by the end of key stage 2 and promoted extensive pupil participation in English lessons in the senior section through increased levels of challenge and the introduction of beneficial self and peer assessment.

Pupils make a strong contribution to the day-to-day running of the school through the primary 'school council' and the senior 'pupil forum'. At primary level, the pupil leadership team organised and ran a charity bingo night, which developed the leadership skills of Year 6 pupils well. At senior level, the provision of table-tennis facilities, requested through the forum, enhances pupils' use of their free time. Currently, however pupils have only limited involvement in influencing the school's future strategic direction.

The school uses its resources efficiently to provide a high-quality education for its pupils. Leaders and governors have a successful record of managing finances robustly and creatively, for example to fund major capital projects. These include the opening of a sixth form in September 2013 as well as significant additions to the premises and accommodation for both the primary and secondary sections of the school.

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

## 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))

Under the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, the school must provide copies of the report to all parents of the school. Where a pupil is subject to placement by a local authority, a copy of the report should be sent by the school to each relevant authority.

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

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Excellent</b>                                   | 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:

Publication Section  
Estyn  
Anchor Court, Keen Road  
Cardiff  
CF24 5JW or by email to [publications@estyn.gov.wales](mailto:publications@estyn.gov.wales)

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