



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

A report on
Stanwell School

Archer Road
Penarth
CF64 2XL

Date of inspection: February 2022

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Stanwell School

Name of provider	Stanwell School
Local authority	The Vale of Glamorgan
Language of the provider	English Medium
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	1998
Pupils of statutory school age	1523
Number in sixth form (if applicable)	474
Percentage of statutory school age pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average <i>(The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in the secondary sector is 18.7%)</i>	4.9%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) <i>(The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in the secondary sector is 21.7%)</i>	13.3%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils who speak Welsh at home	2.2%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils with English as an additional language	1.1%
Date of headteacher appointment	
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	12-05-2015
Start date of inspection	
Additional information	

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

Stanwell School offers pupils a stimulating learning environment and a wide range of opportunities for them to pursue their own interests. Senior leaders provide a clear direction to staff and have high expectations for continuous improvement. They have fostered an ethos where staff are confident to be innovative and experiment with their teaching methods. Senior leaders understand the importance of developing subject-specific teaching methodologies and trust middle leaders to promote strategies that engage pupils' curiosity and capture their interest. In most cases, the quality of teaching is high. Leaders are placing an increasing focus on pupils' well-being and staff show high levels of respect and care for pupils. The school also offers pupils valuable opportunities to take on key leadership roles and get their voice heard.

The school offers pupils a wide range of educational, sporting and cultural experiences that allows them to pursue their interests and develop their talents. There are particular strengths in how the school offers advice to pupils to help them make choices for the next stage in their life. However, pupils make their subject choices at the end of Year 8, which limits their opportunities to study subjects such as art and music.

In most cases, teachers are enthusiastic about their subject and plan their lessons carefully to ensure pupils make strong progress. There are very positive working relationships between staff and pupils and, in many cases, teachers encourage and support pupils to progress to the best of their ability. Most pupils have positive attitudes towards learning and many are aspirational. They are articulate and have good reading skills, although they do not always make enough progress in their ability to communicate in Welsh. In general, pupils make strong gains in their subject understanding and skills, although in a few instances teachers do not ensure that pupils understand the reasoning behind the methods they use to solve particular problems. Pupils with additional learning needs make good progress as a result of well-considered, individualised support.

Staff are sensitive to pupils' needs and consistently promote a positive culture based on high aspirations, inclusivity and respect. The school's provision for personal and social education is well considered and comprehensive, although pupils feel that they do not get enough time during the school day to relax, socialise or pursue their own interests. Overall, pupils' behaviour is good and in many cases it is exemplary. In most instances, pupils interact well with one another and support each others' learning. They listen carefully to their peers' views and respond maturely to them.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve teachers' use of questioning to develop pupils' ability to think independently
- R2 Ensure that pupils get enough time during the school day to relax, socialise or pursue their own interests
- R3 Increase the range of opportunities that pupils have to practise their Welsh

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 case studies on its work in relation to developing pupils' leadership skills and the school's guidance to pupils for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main evaluation

Learning

In lessons, most pupils make strong progress in their subject knowledge and skills. As the restrictions due to the pandemic have lessened, pupils have benefited from engaging with activities that they had missed such as practical experiments, working with tools, group work, class discussions, acting and sports. Overall, pupils develop their ability to apply their subject understanding well, for example when considering why certain kinds of seismic waves cannot be felt on the other side of the earth in their science lessons. In most cases, pupils with additional learning needs make strong progress against their targets.

Most pupils listen well to each other and their teachers. Many have a wide general and subject-specific vocabulary. They are articulate and respond thoughtfully to other pupils' ideas in lively classroom discussions. A minority of pupils show sophistication in their ability to explore ideas, for example when discussing the existence of the soul in their religious education lessons. Where pupils take a modern foreign language, most develop their vocabulary and grammatical understanding of that language well. In these lessons, a minority of pupils are able to offer extended, well-constructed answers to their teachers' questions.

Nearly all pupils have strong reading skills. When reading aloud, many do so with confidence and good expression. Most pupils are able to read challenging texts, extract relevant information from them and highlight key points. They can summarise and synthesise well, for example when using a range of historical sources to draw conclusions. In general, they make accurate inferences from texts.

Most pupils are developing their ability to write at length well. They communicate coherently with generally accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar. Many pupils produce well-crafted pieces of extended writing in their English lessons and a few other subjects such as history and geography. A majority are able to produce well-constructed and persuasive writing, for example when explaining the effects of a sugar tax on the market for soft drinks in their economics lessons. However, pupils do not produce enough extended writing in a few subjects. Many pupils are developing their ability to take notes from different sources well; they include apposite quotations and identify pertinent points. Most write at length in their modern foreign language lessons using a wide range of vocabulary, sentence structures and tenses.

Most pupils have a competent grasp of basic numeracy techniques and use these in a suitable range of subjects. Most can make simple calculations such as percentage changes accurately and many are able to manipulate formulae appropriately. Many pupils can correctly allocate and convert between different units. A majority are able to make well-considered analyses of statistical data for example when analysing demographics in their history lessons. Most pupils can construct and plot line graphs accurately. They understand how to describe correlations between variables and can interpret patterns in the data competently. However, pupils do not always consider the reasoning behind the methods they use to solve mathematical problems, mainly as they do not get sufficient opportunities to do so.

Nearly all pupils develop their physical skills well in their physical education lessons. They also develop their fine motor skills successfully in a range of practical activities, such as when carrying out scientific experiments or working with textiles in their design technology lessons. When given the opportunity, most pupils show strong creative skills, for example when writing a non-linear narrative describing the Aberfan disaster in their drama lessons.

In a minority of cases, pupils make very good progress in their ability to communicate in Welsh. In other instances, they make only modest progress and continue to make basic errors in pronunciation and sentence structure. Pupils have suitable opportunities to use Welsh in school eisteddfodau and residential trips. However, they do not use their Welsh frequently enough apart from in their Welsh lessons. In general, pupils who received their education in Welsh in primary school do not make enough progress in the language.

In the sixth form, most pupils demonstrate a good understanding of their work. Many are able to explain clearly, fundamental concepts of the topics they study. For example, pupils following physics A level are able to explain how changes in the speed of light in different media cause refraction. In general, pupils in the sixth-form are extremely articulate and thoughtful. They can apply complex ideas to new and unfamiliar situations well such as when using the normal distribution to test different hypotheses. A minority of pupils make exceptional progress in their subject knowledge and understanding. Many pupils develop a strong understanding of specific personal interests as a result of their Welsh Baccalaureate projects. During these projects, they gain valuable research skills such as the ability to reference their work correctly.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Most pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and take pride in their work. They arrive promptly to lessons and settle quickly to their tasks. Many are enthusiastic learners and work diligently in class. They co-operate with each other maturely in pairs and small groups. They show respect for the contribution of others and offer support to their peers. A few pupils remain passive in their lessons. A minority of pupils use feedback from their teacher effectively to reflect on and improve their learning. Many pupils have very high aspirations, demonstrate curiosity and show interest in their work.

Most pupils feel safe in school and many feel that any incidents of bullying or harassment are dealt with appropriately. Overall, pupils' behaviour in lessons is exemplary. Many behave well when moving between their classes and during break and lunch times and nearly all are polite and courteous to visitors and respectful to school staff. They have strong social skills and present themselves assuredly when sharing their views about their school experiences with visitors.

In many cases, pupils develop their understanding of ethical and contemporary issues well through the curriculum and the wide range of clubs and societies available to them. For example, pupils in the Eco-club demonstrate their commitment to sustainability by setting up a cycle-to-school week to encourage more pupils to consider the environment in their journey to school. Nearly all pupils value the quality of the food available to them in the school canteen and this contributes effectively to

many of them making healthy life choices. Nonetheless, most pupils feel that they do not get enough time to socialise, relax or exercise during their lunch break.

Many pupils value the broad range of enrichment activities available to them and these activities impact very positively on their well-being. Pupil participation rates across these extensive opportunities are high, particularly in sports and expressive arts clubs. Pupils in the school's 'neurodiversity club' feel valued and appreciate the opportunity the club provides them to celebrate diversity within the school and to develop friendships and communication with like-minded peers.

Pupils understand and exercise their democratic rights and responsibilities by contributing their time and views through the pupil representative groups in the school. For example, 'curriculum consultants' contribute meaningfully to developing schemes of learning for subject areas in light of the new Curriculum for Wales. Peer-to-peer mentoring in the school empowers both the mentors and mentees.

Diverse groups of pupils participate responsibly to decision-making at the school through the many leadership opportunities available to them. Sixth formers take an active role in representing the views of others. For example, as part of the democratically appointed senior student leadership team, senior pupils provide a beneficial informal channel of communication between pupils and staff. The majority of pupils feel that school leaders listen to their views.

Teaching and learning experiences

Most teachers have strong subject knowledge and are good role models for their pupils. They foster positive working relationships, and provide clear and helpful explanations that support pupils' learning well. These teachers make effective use of subject terminology and provide strong language models to help pupils to improve their spoken and written responses.

Many teachers understand how to select and use the most appropriate subject-specific teaching strategies to support learning. They plan their lessons carefully to engage and capture pupils' interest and spark their curiosity. This helps pupils to develop their skills, build on their prior knowledge and deepen their understanding. These teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and ensure that work is well matched to pupils' abilities.

In a very few cases, where teaching is particularly effective, teachers use an extensive range of approaches that support pupils to become resilient, independent learners. In these instances, teachers model processes and thinking skilfully, and demand high quality responses from their pupils. They use a wide range of techniques to discover pupils' misconceptions and support them sensitively to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding. In these lessons, pupils develop their thinking skills and make exceptional progress in their subject understanding.

In a few lessons, teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve and do not challenge them sufficiently. They plan activities that are repetitive and do not build well enough on each other, or on pupils' prior learning. In these lessons, teachers do not provide clear or precise enough explanations to support pupils' understanding and do not intervene well enough with off-task behaviour.

In general, teachers monitor pupils' learning in lessons suitably and provide helpful verbal feedback to support their progress. In nearly all lessons, teachers ask suitable closed questions to check pupils' recall. A minority of teachers use questioning skilfully to challenge pupils' thinking and deepen their learning. However, in other cases, teachers do not use questions well enough to probe and develop pupils' understanding of their work. Overall, the quality and usefulness of written feedback are highly variable. In the minority of instances where written feedback is particularly useful, teachers offer pupils clear guidance on how to improve their work and provide them with valuable opportunities to do so.

The school has a comprehensive system to monitor and track pupils' progress. Leaders and teachers use this effectively to identify pupils who are at risk of underachieving and intervene successfully. This includes offering valuable support for those with weaker literacy and numeracy skills. Individual departments identify pupils' strengths and areas for improvement and many teachers use this information well to plan the next steps in pupils' learning.

Where appropriate, most teachers employ a range of effective strategies to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. The school provides a wide range of useful opportunities for pupils to apply these skills in different contexts across many areas of the curriculum. Suitable opportunities also exist for pupils to use basic digital skills. The school offers pupils appropriate opportunities to develop their appreciation and understanding of Welsh language and culture through activities like eisteddfodau and visits, such as to Glan Llyn and Llangrannog. However, apart from in Welsh lessons, staff do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to develop their ability to communicate in Welsh.

The school's curriculum supports most pupils' academic progress effectively. The current curriculum and developments towards the Curriculum for Wales are clearly aligned to the vision for teaching and curriculum, which focuses strongly on developing subject knowledge, understanding and skills. However, not all pupils have sufficient opportunities to study art and music beyond Year 8.

There is a wide range of academic and vocational options available for pupils to study at Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5. The school provides helpful information and guidance prior to the option process and almost all pupils are able to choose the subjects they wish to study. A few pupils at Key Stage 4 access relevant courses with external providers for part of the week, which help to meet their learning needs.

A well-structured programme of weekly personal and social education lessons, supplemented by whole days devoted to particular topics, supports the development of pupils' social and emotional skills sensitively. Many valuable enrichment activities are also available during the week, such as subject clubs, a Duke of Edinburgh programme, theatre trips, two annual school shows and regular sports practices. There are high participation rates in these activities, which are an important part of many pupils' learning experiences. An enrichment week in June 2021 provided a varied range of suitable learning and well-being activities to help pupils recover from the isolation of the pandemic.

Care, support and guidance

Stanwell School develops pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding well. Staff are sensitive to pupils' needs and consistently promote a positive culture based on high aspirations, inclusivity and respect. The school has a well-considered and comprehensive personal and social education programme to develop pupils' awareness of their own well-being, mental health, and emotional needs. In addition, there is a wide range of well-planned opportunities to explore themes such as identity, equality, and diversity. Overall, these programmes are having a positive impact on pupils' personal development and most pupils interact with their peers with care and respect. During the pandemic, the school maintained its face-to-face transition arrangements to help pupils settle in school.

Pupils have many opportunities to develop their imagination and creativity, for example through the highly popular and successful school productions. In addition there is a wide selection of extra-curricular clubs and worthwhile school trips. Activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme and regular charity fundraising enhance the personal development of pupils. The school offers pupils valuable opportunities to take part in making decisions about important aspects of school life. In addition to a student council, pupils get the chance to join other groups that have a specific focus. In addition to influencing the school's curriculum, these groups celebrate diversity and encourage respect, empathy, and inclusion throughout the school.

A notable feature of the school's provision is its well-coordinated and valuable careers guidance to help pupils and parents explore future choices. Staff organise open evenings that cater to pupils' interests well and offer useful information on a range of careers, particularly those in science, technology, engineering and maths, and apprenticeships with local employers. All pupils have access to beneficial specialist support, advice and guidance and are encouraged to attend national fairs, college or university open days.

During the past few years, leaders have strengthened the school's arrangements to keep pupils safe, and staff at all levels work carefully to promote a positive safeguarding culture. All staff receive beneficial training to keep themselves and pupils safe and they are clear about the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils. The school responds to safeguarding concerns promptly and makes referrals to outside agencies when appropriate. It has a coherent system to record details of any incidents and leaders deploy school staff and external partners thoughtfully to support individual pupils. The school has strong procedures for promoting pupils' attendance which include close monitoring, communication with parents and celebrations of success.

The provision for pupils with additional learning needs is a strength of the school. The additional learning needs co-ordinator and the learning support team know the pupils with additional learning needs well and provide them with well-considered support. The school has comprehensive systems to monitor these pupils' progress against their individual targets. Staff use information from this system well to provide tailored interventions to support pupils' well-being and their academic progress. Stanwell School promotes and supports the well-being of vulnerable pupils well. For example,

it has employed a member of staff to support looked-after children to help these pupils thrive within the school.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school based on nurturing pupils' well-being and supporting their aspirations. He is managing change effectively as he steers the school sensitively through a period of educational change following the disruption caused by the pandemic.

Senior leaders have introduced beneficial approaches to collaborative working and collective learning, which are fostering a sense of cohesion among staff. Leaders are increasingly promoting an inclusive ethos based on trust and respect where all pupils 'learn to excel' in a broad range of contexts. This refocusing of the school's vision is beginning to permeate the work of the school. Leaders are starting to share this vision more widely to create beneficial opportunities for parents and pupils to discuss the future priorities of the school.

Leaders are placing an increasing priority on promoting a culture of safeguarding where pupils' well-being is central. The headteacher has restructured the roles and responsibilities within the leadership team to support this change. The addition of a deputy headteacher to lead on pastoral responsibilities has created leadership structure that is balanced well to support pupils' learning and well-being. There is a strong sense of teamwork amongst leaders that is supporting change. Members of the senior team have complementary skills and challenge one another supportively. Leadership roles and responsibilities are well defined, yet flexible enough for the school to respond effectively to national priorities such as the additional learning needs transformation programme and development of the new curriculum.

Middle leaders value the support that they receive from the senior team. They understand the school's priorities and vision for improvement well. Overall, they lead their areas of responsibility effectively. Where there are inconsistencies in middle leadership, senior leaders take positive action to support and improve performance. All management functions, such as meetings and accountability systems, are aligned closely to the school's vision and priorities. Arrangements for performance management are suitable and focus on key areas for improvement. They include ambitious objectives, helpful success criteria and beneficial opportunities for staff to improve their practice.

Governors support the school well. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement including the provision for healthy eating and drinking. They are involved appropriately in the life of the school and offer leaders robust challenge that helps guide their decisions.

Leaders and governors ensure that funding is directed appropriately towards the school's priorities. The Pupil Development Grant has been used appropriately to increase the school's capacity to support the well-being of pupils.

Senior leaders have high expectations for all aspects of the school's work and promote a culture of continuous improvement. There is an extensive and focused programme of departmental reviews, lesson observations, learning walks and work

scrutiny, as well as consideration of staff and pupils' views. These activities provide leaders with a secure understanding of the quality of provision and its impact on pupils' progress and well-being. They are also used successfully to develop a strong professional dialogue around how to achieve high quality provision. Overall, middle leaders understand the strengths and areas for improvement within their areas of responsibility well and create well-considered and coherent plans for improvement. These aspects contribute successfully to improvements in the quality of teaching, the standard of pupils' work and to pupils' well-being.

Leaders have high expectations of all staff. They are encouraged and supported to develop their practice and contribute to whole school initiatives. This approach promotes a sense of shared endeavour where leaders place trust in the expertise of teachers and encourage them to explore and deploy the most effective subject specific strategies. The school has a strong commitment to professional learning over time and offers teaching and support staff detailed and tailored programmes to support their work. These programmes help teachers to focus on developing their teaching and their understanding of the Curriculum for Wales. Overall, professional learning is having a positive impact on the practice of teachers and support staff. The school utilises its partnership work as a lead school for teacher education to help create a strong culture of enquiry-based learning for all staff. There is a clear vision and sustained investment in a coaching culture for improving the practice of teaching and learning support staff.

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

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 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

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