



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

A report on

Lewis Girls' Comprehensive School

**Oakfield Street
Ystrad Mynach
Hengoed
CF82 7WW**

Date of inspection: October 2022

by

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

About Lewis Girls' Comprehensive School

Name of provider	Lewis Girls' Comprehensive School
Local authority	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	671
Pupils of statutory school age	572
Number in sixth form	99
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 18.5%)	20.7%
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 23.0%)	12.1%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	1%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	*
Date of headteacher appointment	01/10/2021
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/11/2014
Start date of inspection	03/10/2022

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

Lewis Girls' School offers pupils a wide range of exciting learning experiences, both within and outside of the classroom. Many pupils really enjoy coming to school and are conscientious learners. Most behave very well in lessons and around the school and have well-developed social skills.

Most teachers foster positive working relationships with pupils and many plan their lessons well. As a result, pupils in these lessons make good progress in their subject knowledge and understanding, as well as in their literacy, numeracy and digital skills. However, pupils do not make as much progress in their ability to communicate in Welsh as they should. There is a strong emphasis on supporting pupils' well-being and the curriculum contributes well to pupils' ethical, social, and cultural awareness. There is a wide range of opportunities for pupils to express their views in active pupil groups that have an extensive influence on school life.

Staff in Lewis Girls' School are caring and there is a strong sense of 'belonging' among pupils. The well-being team offer pupils useful guidance in order to help them understand how to keep themselves safe. Staff collaborate beneficially with a wide variety of outside agencies to support pupils and their families. However, pupils' attendance, especially of those eligible for free school meals, is lower than it was before the pandemic.

The school has robust arrangements to quality assure and seek feedback about its work. Leaders listen carefully to pupils' views and respond to them positively, making changes where appropriate. In addition, there is a comprehensive programme of professional learning for teaching staff. Teachers are encouraged to collaborate, innovate and share practice to support their professional practice and benefit from opportunities to work with partners outside of the school. These arrangements have helped secure improvements in teaching and learning, while contributing to a positive and caring learning environment.

The headteacher is passionate about the school and is supported ably by the rest of her senior leadership team. Together, they provide strong leadership and promote a positive vision for pupils underpinned by high expectations for their academic progress and well-being. However, the leadership of additional learning needs (ALN) is not structured well enough which doesn't maximise the potential in this area of the school's work.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve the provision for developing pupils' Welsh language skills and their knowledge of Welsh culture
- R2 Strengthen the provision for monitoring and improving pupils' attendance, particularly for those eligible for free school meals
- R3 Revise the leadership of additional learning needs, so that it ensures a strong strategic direction and supports the full implementation of the ALNET act

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 broadening pupils' horizons and professional learning for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main evaluation

Learning

In many lessons, pupils make good progress in their subject knowledge and understanding. A majority of pupils recall prior learning accurately and build on this well. In a few cases, they make exceptional progress as a result of highly skilled and inspirational teaching. However, in a minority of instances, pupils do not make as much progress as they could, most often due to a lack of challenge in the teaching.

Many pupils have a suitable general and subject-specific vocabulary. They express their ideas clearly and confidently in classroom discussions and listen respectfully to their peers and their teachers. A few pupils are more reluctant to answer questions and offer only brief underdeveloped responses. A very few do not listen carefully enough to their teachers and miss important instructions or explanations.

Many pupils read aloud with fluency and good expression. They use a range of strategies such as skimming and scanning competently to find relevant information in texts. They are able to compare different texts effectively, for example when considering the differences in the nativity stories from the Gospels of Luke and Matthew. A majority of pupils are able to consider different viewpoints from a variety of texts and come to their own conclusions, for example when answering the question 'Was Emily Davidson a martyr?' in their history lessons. A minority of pupils are developing well their ability to apply more advanced skills such as synthesising, evaluating and creating hypotheses.

Across the curriculum, most pupils produce an appropriate range of extended writing. Most communicate their ideas clearly and many structure their writing into paragraphs appropriately. A majority write with a high degree of technical accuracy and an appropriate sense of audience. A few pupils write with flair and confidence, for example when writing horror stories in the Gothic style. A minority of pupils make frequent mistakes in their spelling, grammar or punctuation. A few struggle to link their sentences coherently in extended writing.

Most pupils are able to add, subtract, multiply and divide competently. Many are able to use their understanding of ratios to solve problems such as scaling up a recipe to feed different numbers of people in a party. As they progress through the school, many develop the ability to calculate using powers. They are able to construct graphs with suitable scales, plot data points and draw lines of best fit to show patterns in the data. They interpret these graphs competently and identify limitations of the evidence presented. In general, pupils use their numeracy skills appropriately in subjects across the curriculum, for example when calculating a bungee rope's extension in their science lessons. However, a few pupils do not make enough progress in their mathematics lessons because the work that they are given is not sufficiently challenging.

In general, pupils develop their digital skills well across the curriculum. Nearly all are confident users of a range of software applications. For example, they can use spreadsheets to record data and apply formulae to carry-out basic calculations.

Many pupils develop their creative skills successfully, particularly in their art and drama lessons. In addition, they enhance their creativity during their 'STEM' (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) lessons when solving problems such as how best to support a hydroponics (soil-free) container in which to grow plants.

Nearly all pupils develop their physical skills well in their physical education lessons. They also develop these well in a few other subjects, notably in music when singing, playing keyboards and beating in rhythm with music.

In the sixth form, most pupils are making very good progress in developing their critical thinking alongside advanced subject knowledge and skills. Many are able to discuss their ideas eloquently. However, in a very few cases, pupils are not making enough progress mainly due to insufficient explanations or challenge from their teachers.

A few pupils make suitable progress in Welsh. However, partly due to a limited curriculum in Key Stage 4, many pupils do not develop their ability to communicate in Welsh well enough.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Many pupils are enthusiastic and conscientious learners. Most behave very well in lessons and around the school and are polite and respectful to adults, visitors and to each other. Most pupils feel safe and secure in school. They say that there are very few incidences of bullying and that staff deal well with this when it occurs.

Most pupils are punctual, arrive to their lessons ready to learn and settle quickly to their work. Many apply themselves well in lessons, and show resilience and ambition, remaining focussed on their work. They display interest and enthusiasm in their work resulting in well-presented and creative responses to tasks set by teachers.

When given constructive feedback, many pupils respond positively and improve the quality of their work. Most support each other well, for example when working in pairs and groups. They show respect for the contribution of others and respond thoughtfully to their ideas in classroom discussions.

Many pupils enjoy being in the school. They benefit from opportunities to take part in the wide range of extra-curricular activities offered, for example football, netball, dance club and the school choir. However, many pupils feel that the lunch break is too short to eat food, socialise and pursue their own interests.

A majority of pupils say that the school listens to their views and sometimes makes changes as a result. However, pupils say they would like to review current lunchtime arrangements as some feel that they do not have enough time to consume a healthy lunch, socialise with friends or pursue their own interests. Pupils benefit from valuable opportunities to take on leadership roles for example through involvement in the school council, language ambassadors and the Eco club.

Most pupils in the sixth form are mature, well-organised and independent. They contribute strongly to school life, for example by organising charity events, providing support in extra-curricular clubs and mentoring younger pupils to support their wellbeing and their reading and numeracy skills.

Although attendance has improved compared to last year, when the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact nationally on school attendance, pupils eligible for free school meals have a particularly high rate of absence compared with other pupils.

Teaching and learning experiences

Strong working relationships between teachers and pupils are a notable feature of most lessons. Teachers in these lessons are calm and supportive. They use praise and encouragement judiciously to manage pupils' behaviour and promote constructive attitudes to learning. They create a positive working environment where pupils develop the confidence to ask questions and participate well in class discussions.

Most teachers' subject knowledge is secure and up to date. Many teachers are enthusiastic about their subject and are strong language models who reinforce the use of key terms and vocabulary with pupils helpfully.

In many lessons, teachers plan purposeful activities that are organised well and enable pupils to make good progress. In these lessons, teachers provide clear instructions, prepare helpful resources and consider carefully what they want pupils to learn. They give pupils valuable opportunities to choose how to complete their work, for example, by facilitating their use of laptops alongside their books and other resources. In these lessons, the level of challenge is appropriate and the pace of learning is suitable. In a majority of lessons, teachers offer useful examples or model work helpfully. This supports pupils well to develop as independent learners.

In the few, most effective lessons, teachers display a passion for their subject that enthuses and inspires pupils. They plan their lessons meticulously to meet pupils' needs and capture their interests. These teachers provide a carefully judged level of challenge that enables nearly all pupils to make rapid progress. They have particularly high expectations of pupils' behaviour and what they can achieve. These teachers question pupils skilfully, encouraging them to think for themselves.

In a minority of lessons, teachers' planning does not consider the needs or abilities of pupils well enough and their expectations are not sufficiently high. In these lessons, the pace of the learning is too slow because the work given to pupils is either too difficult or too easy. In a few lessons, teachers over-scaffold the learning or do not model it well enough. This means that pupils become over-reliant on the teacher and do not develop their independent learning skills as well as they could. In these lessons, teachers do not manage pupils' behaviour well enough. In a very few lessons, teachers' instructions are not very clear or the teacher presents for too long.

In general, most teachers use questioning well to check pupils' understanding and prior learning. Many also question pupils effectively to probe and deepen their knowledge and understanding, often through skilful use of open questions. In a minority of cases, teachers' questioning does not probe pupils' knowledge and understanding well enough and in a few cases their questioning is not sufficiently targeted, meaning that the same pupils tend to answer questions.

Many teachers and teaching assistants provide helpful, verbal feedback to pupils when circulating the classroom. Many also provide useful written feedback both in books and online. This gives pupils valuable advice for improvement that helps them to make progress. In a minority of cases, teachers' advice for improvement is not precise enough and teachers' expectations of how pupils should respond to feedback are unclear.

Leaders collect a comprehensive range of data related to pupils' abilities, their engagement and their progress. This is analysed and discussed regularly to identify and provide help for pupils who need additional support.

Parents receive helpful interim and end of year reports on the progress of their children. On the whole, these reports contain useful information on what pupils are doing well and, to a lesser extent, what they need to do to improve.

The school is developing an engaging new curriculum for Years 7 and 8. This has been planned to reflect the local area and responds appropriately to the interests of pupils. Leaders have planned the curriculum carefully so that there is an appropriate balance of subject-specific content and skills alongside purposeful and relevant cross-curricular links. As a result, pupils take part in exciting experiences that capture their interest and help them to progress in their skills, knowledge and understanding. For example, pupils make and race electric track cars in their STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) lessons and develop sustainable approaches to energy and materials by making new clothes from old.

Leaders have developed a well-coordinated plan to ensure that pupils make progress in their literacy, numeracy and digital skills across the curriculum. As a result, there are valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their extended writing skills in most subjects. In science and technology, pupils are able to apply and develop their numeracy skills to explore the behaviour of the world around them. Most subjects plan valuable opportunities for pupils develop their digital skills, for example through programming control systems for rockets and robot explorers. The school also has a programme of beneficial interventions for pupils who need additional support for their literacy and numeracy skills.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum that builds effectively on pupils' prior learning. This is aided by beneficial shared approaches to the development of pupils' skills with its partner primary schools. In addition, there is a useful transition programme that includes Year 5 and 6 pupils visiting the school to work in the outdoor learning spaces such as the 'eco-garden'. In Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, pupils are offered a wide range of courses including law, criminology, public services and medical science. The school also works with other providers to broaden its curriculum offer in the sixth form and to provide practical work experience in fields such as hairdressing and baking for Key Stage 4 pupils. Overall, the curriculum provides appropriate progression as pupils move through the school. However, the curriculum does not develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of geography sufficiently.

There are opportunities for pupils to develop their knowledge of Welsh culture through the school eisteddfod and the work of the 'Cryw Cymraeg' pupil group. However, leaders do not promote pupils' use or knowledge of Welsh language and

culture well enough. In particular, the provision to develop many pupils' Welsh language skills in Key Stage 4 is insufficient.

The school's Personal and Social Education (PSE) programme is comprehensive and covers relevant issues such as healthy living and online safety. It also provides valuable opportunities for pupils to explore their identity, values and life choices. This helps them to grow in their understanding and knowledge so that they develop well as ethical and informed citizens. There are extensive opportunities across the curriculum and beyond for pupils to reflect on cultural diversity and identity. This encourages them to develop an understanding of how they can make a positive contribution to society and the well-being of others. The learning experiences offered to pupils mean that pupils from all backgrounds are engaged and enabled to take up challenges that encourage them to reflect on who they are and how they can contribute to the community.

Pupils benefit from helpful advice and guidance on future careers and pathways, as well as valuable opportunities to learn about the world of work. For example, sixth form pupils have mock interviews, presentations from local business people, universities and alumni, as well as one-to-one careers meetings.

The school offers a wide range of enrichment activities, which are well attended. These allow pupils to gain valuable experiences that support their learning and wider development. This programme includes worthwhile opportunities for pupils to grow fruit and vegetables that are harvested and cooked by pupils, pursue STEM experiences such as designing and racing electric cars, and join a diversity club for personal support.

Care, support and guidance

Lewis Girls' Comprehensive school is a caring and inclusive community. Leaders have fostered a supportive and nurturing ethos where pupils and staff develop strong and respectful relationships.

Support for pupils' emotional, physical, and mental health is extensive. A well-structured and agile well-being programme, along with the 'Ty Croeso' provision, enables pupils to discuss and explore their thoughts and feelings. As a result, pupils develop their interpersonal skills and an understanding of how to make healthy lifestyle choices.

The school works closely with external partners to successfully support the safety and well-being of its pupils. For example, they collaborate effectively with 'Operation Encompass' to support pupils who have been exposed to domestic violence. Furthermore, a variety of approaches, such as music therapy, successfully support more vulnerable pupils to engage positively in school.

Staff at all levels promote a strong culture of safeguarding. As a result, most pupils feel safe in school. Arrangements for safeguarding are clear and comprehensive. Procedures to identify and record child protection incidents are thorough and the school responds promptly to reports of a safeguarding nature, making appropriate referrals where necessary. All staff receive regular training on child protection and safeguarding matters and are clear about their role in keeping pupils safe. There are

appropriate arrangements for the safe recruitment of staff and others who are in contact with pupils. In addition, the school implements a range of strategies to help pupils understand how to keep themselves safe.

The school's arrangements for dealing with any incidents of bullying are clear. There is an effective system for reporting these, and pupils trained as peer mentors offer support and guidance to younger pupils. Moreover, the school has successfully developed a positive inclusion approach which involves all parties and a well-considered approach to behaviour management.

Staff know the pupils very well. One-page profiles and individual care plans provide valuable information to help staff to meet the needs of pupils in lessons and outside. However, the current structure for the leadership of the provision for pupils with ALN (additional learning needs) is not effective enough in order to deliver the full aims of the Additional Learning Needs Education and Tribunal (ALNET) act, training of staff or the effective deployment of teaching assistants.

Curricular and extra-curricular arrangements provide appropriate opportunities for pupils to develop an understanding of the issues relating to equality and diversity, to challenge stereotypes and to explore spiritual and ethical beliefs. In addition, the school provides a wide range of beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop their creativity. For example, through dance and musical performances, cultural visits, sporting activities and competitions such as 'robotic programming'.

There are many opportunities for all pupils to have an impact on school life. For example, pupils in the Enfy's club have helped to develop the Key Stage 3 well-being curriculum around gender identity and to address issues such as homophobia.

Following continued low attendance after the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders have revised attendance procedures to include a tailored approach to individual absences. The implementation of these is beginning to have a positive impact on attendance. However, the attendance of pupils eligible for free-school meals remains lower than that of other pupils.

The school offers pupils and parents well-coordinated careers guidance to help them explore future choices. Careers advice for pupils with ALN is comprehensive.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides the school with strong, thoughtful leadership, and is a positive role model for staff and pupils. She is supported ably by the rest of her senior leadership team. Together, they offer a clear direction to staff, which focuses on developing high quality teaching and learning, and effective pastoral care to support pupils' well-being.

Leaders ensure that the school is run smoothly and efficiently. Despite the disruptions of recent years, the school has returned carefully to a pre pandemic programme of work. The school is well resourced. For example, laptops provided by the school to all pupils prior to the pandemic ensured that the school was well prepared for distance and blended learning. Despite an aging building, the site is

well-maintained, and provides pupils with a calm, welcoming and positive learning environment.

Senior leaders have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Regular meetings between the headteacher and senior leaders ensure that they provide consistent messages to staff. Line management arrangements between senior leaders and middle leaders are purposeful and rigorous. These arrangements help ensure that staff are focused collectively on the school's improvement priorities. Leaders have worked well to ensure a shared understanding among staff of the Curriculum for Wales. However, leaders have not focused well enough on the provision for Welsh or the implementation of the ALNET act.

On the whole, middle leaders have a sound understanding of the strengths and areas for development in their areas of responsibility and many lead their departments effectively. Many middle leaders understand their role well. However, a few do not hold members of their department to account well enough.

Arrangements for managing the performance of staff are systematic. They support the achievement of the school's main strategic priorities of teaching and learning effectively. These arrangements are monitored and reviewed well.

Grant funding is used thoughtfully for a wide range of relevant provision, for example to provide literacy and numeracy interventions, support for examination classes as well as to provide access to a range of extra-curricular experiences, such as peripatetic music lessons to disadvantaged pupils and ensuring that all pupils have access to a laptop.

Partnerships with parents and governors are strong. Regular newsletters keep the community well-informed of the school's activities and relevant local matters. A parent council provides leaders of the school valuable insights to help it plan refine and communicate their approaches.

An experienced governing body works well with the leaders of the school to support its work. They provide, robust challenge to the school's work when appropriate, for example on pupils' outcomes, staffing, or on decisions relating to the organisation of the school day. Overall, there is strong oversight of the school's finances by the headteacher and the finance committee of the governing body.

During the pandemic, leaders continued to gather feedback about the effectiveness of the school's provision through a programme of classroom observations and regular scrutiny of pupils' work. Since restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic have reduced, the senior leadership team has increased the rigour of the school's self-evaluation and improvement systems appropriately. Middle leaders contribute suitably to these, for example through reviewing aspects of teaching and learning in departmental meetings and regular discussions with line managers. Leaders value the contribution that staff, pupils, and parents make to self-evaluation and have implemented a wide range of activities to gather timely feedback to inform improvement planning. These include teaching and learning surveys, questionnaires for parents, scrutiny of pupils' work, data analysis and focus group discussions. While self-evaluation activities provide leaders with helpful information around teaching, feedback about how well pupils learn is not always detailed enough.

The school's improvement priorities are clear and appropriate, with a sharp focus on ensuring that learners receive high quality teaching. There is clear alignment between school and departmental priorities, and this has helped to ensure consistency of expectations in relation to teaching and provision for skills. Although leaders' evaluations are generally robust, shortcomings in a few areas are not identified clearly enough. As a result, action to address weaknesses in Welsh language provision, aspects of ALN and arrangements during lunchtime have not been prioritised.

Professional learning for teachers is a strength. The continuous programme of learning, led effectively by the deputy headteacher, has supported the preparations and implementation of Curriculum for Wales and ensures that teaching and learning remains a high priority. Staff are encouraged to collaborate, innovate and learn from each other. Staff also work with a range of external partners to improve their practice, for example through curriculum collaboration with partner primary schools and secondary schools. The school benefits from involvement with an initial teacher education partnership. This enhances staff's professional knowledge and supports the induction and mentoring of new teachers. Provision for the professional development of support staff is not as well developed as that for teaching 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:

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