



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

A report on

Connah's Quay High School

**Golftyn Lane
Connah's Quay
Flintshire
CH5 4BH**

Date of inspection: January 2023

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Connah's Quay High School

Name of provider	Connah's Quay High School
Local authority	Flintshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	Non-denominational
Number of pupils on roll	1058
Pupils of statutory school age	1055
Number in sixth form	N/A
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 20.2%)	25.6%
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 17.8%)	12.3%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.7%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	9.4%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/01/2023
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	24/11/2015
Start date of inspection	23/01/2023

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

In recent years, the school has had a number of different headteachers in a short space of time. These changes have had an impact on the school's capacity to maintain a consistent approach to improving key aspects of its work. Despite this, leaders have fostered an inclusive ethos and developed a range of strategies to support pupils' well-being. The recently appointed new headteacher has a clear vision for the school's future and is quickly gaining an understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in the school's provision.

In general, pupils are positive about their school experience and value the support that is provided. However, a few pupils feel that issues such as bullying are not dealt with well enough, and a minority do not feel that the school's approaches to managing behaviour are consistently fair.

Although membership of the senior leadership team other than the headteacher has remained relatively stable during recent years, over time, their roles have become unclear and unbalanced. This hampers their capacity to secure improvement and makes it difficult for them to be held to account fully. In addition, systems to evaluate the school's provision and plan for improvement are not robust or precise enough. This has led to leaders at all levels having an overgenerous view of the school's performance. As a result, leadership has not had sufficient impact on, for example, the quality of teaching or pupils' attendance, engagement and progress.

In the majority of cases, teaching is suitably effective, but pupils are not always challenged enough, which limits the progress they make. The school has beneficial provision to support pupils with additional learning needs and those for whom English is an additional language. However, it does not have a coherent strategy for developing pupils' skills in literacy, numeracy, information and Welsh, or their digital skills.

Recommendations

- R1 Refine the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders so that they are equitable and enable them to carry out their roles effectively and be held to account for securing improvement
- R2 Strengthen processes for self-evaluation and improvement planning
- R3 Improve teaching and assessment in order to challenge and engage all pupils
- R4 Strengthen provision to improve pupils' attendance, engagement and attitudes to learning
- R5 Strengthen provision for the progressive development of pupils' skills in literacy, numeracy and Welsh, and their digital skills

What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school is in need of significant improvement. The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress about 12 months after the publication of this report.

Main evaluation

Learning

In lessons, the majority of pupils make suitable progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills. They have suitable recall of their prior learning and a minority apply this well to new contexts, such as when they use their knowledge of respiration to understand the process of diffusion in the lungs. A few pupils make strong progress, for example when developing their understanding of the changing role of women in Nazi Germany. Pupils with ALN make appropriate progress against their individual targets. A minority of pupils make only limited progress and are too passive in their lessons, often as the result of shortcomings in teaching.

The majority of pupils can confidently locate relevant information from a variety of texts. A few older pupils analyse source material well. However, overall, pupils do not have sufficiently well-developed reading strategies. This restricts their ability to, for example, decode unfamiliar words. This is largely because they do not have sufficient opportunities to develop their reading skills across the curriculum.

Around half of pupils write with suitable technical accuracy. When given the opportunity, a minority produce suitably structured extended writing. A few construct fluent, well-structured pieces, for example when analysing poetry by Maya Angelou. However, around half of pupils do not write with sufficient accuracy or clarity. In part, this is because they do not have enough opportunities across the curriculum to write at length for a range of purposes and audiences.

During class discussions, around half of pupils participate enthusiastically. They use subject terms confidently and explain their ideas clearly. A few express themselves maturely and articulately. Around half are reluctant to contribute verbally or give only very brief, underdeveloped responses.

Although a minority of pupils make suitable progress in their Welsh lessons, the majority make only limited progress and a very few pupils do not currently attend any Welsh lessons. Limited opportunities to practise their skills outside of Welsh lessons restrict pupils' development in this area.

The majority of pupils have sound numeracy skills. When given the opportunity, they use these skills appropriately across the curriculum, for example when investigating energy efficiency in science or calculating the mechanical advantage of a lever in design technology. A minority of pupils have weak number skills and struggle with, for example, basic multiplication or identifying prime numbers.

In a few instances, pupils use their digital skills appropriately across the curriculum, such as when they manipulate images digitally in art. A few demonstrate strong thinking skills, for example by making convincing arguments for equivalent algebraic expressions. Overall, pupils develop their creative skills well. They design amplifiers, can crushers and wind turbines in design technology and create a diorama of a savanna in geography.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

In general, pupils enjoy school and feel safe and well-supported by staff. Many feel that instances of bullying and harassment are suitably addressed. However, a few pupils feel that that staff do not deal well enough with bullying. In addition, a minority of pupils believe that the school's system for rewards and sanctions is not applied consistently enough, which results in a sense of unfairness.

Most pupils are courteous and respectful to staff and visitors, and many behave appropriately in lessons. The majority sustain their concentration and engage well with learning activities, whether working independently or in pairs or small groups. Around half are confident in expressing their views and listen carefully to others during class discussion. A few are resilient and resourceful learners and collaborate effectively when dealing with challenging tasks. A minority do not engage purposefully in lessons. They rely too heavily on their teachers and are passive in their learning. This is particularly evident where teachers' expectations are too low.

The attendance of pupils, particularly those eligible for free school meals or with additional learning needs, is a cause for concern. A few pupils are regularly late to lessons, which disrupts learning and has a negative impact on their progress and that of others.

In general, pupils understand how to make healthy lifestyle choices, and enjoy participating in the range of extra-curricular and sporting activities on offer.

A very few pupils develop their leadership skills well in their role as well-being ambassadors. Overall, opportunities for pupil involvement are limited and not sufficiently diverse or representative of the school community. As a result, a minority of pupils do not feel listened to.

Teaching and learning experiences

In many cases, teachers develop positive, mutually respectful working relationships with their classes. The majority use a variety of effective teaching approaches that enable pupils to make at least suitable progress in their knowledge, understanding and skills. In a minority of lessons, however, shortcomings in teaching – particularly low expectations of what pupils can achieve – restrict the progress that pupils make.

Where teaching is suitably effective, teachers plan a variety of challenging tasks that build purposefully on pupils' prior learning. They provide clear instructions to pupils and where appropriate make good use of digital technology to engage their interest. These teachers create a calm and positive environment where they challenge pupils appropriately to develop their independence in learning.

In a few instances, teachers' passion for their subject helps to inspire pupils' enthusiasm. They have high expectations of their pupils and use careful planning to ensure a brisk pace of learning. These teachers use questioning skilfully to deepen pupils' understanding and encourage them to think for themselves.

Where teaching is not effective enough, it is because teachers do not have sufficiently high expectations. These lessons are often too teacher-led, which prevents pupils from contributing meaningfully and developing their independence.

Teachers do not match activities sufficiently well to pupils' needs, and pupils spend too much time completing undemanding tasks. This is because teachers' planning does not focus sharply enough on the specific skills, knowledge and understanding that they want pupils to learn. In these lessons, teachers often do not manage class discussion or use questioning to develop pupils' thinking well enough.

In the majority of lessons, teachers provide suitable verbal feedback to support pupils' progress. In a few instances, they monitor progress carefully and intervene skilfully and swiftly to address any misconceptions. In around half of cases, teachers use written feedback suitably to set pupils targets for improvement, for example through 'Pit Stop' reviews. A few pupils improve their work notably in light of their teachers' advice. Overall, written feedback has limited impact on pupils' progress. Too often, teachers are often overgenerous with their praise and do not make clear enough to pupils how they can improve their work. Poor quality or incomplete work is not challenged by teachers in a minority of cases.

The school's curriculum reflects the context and diversity of its community suitably and meets the needs of many learners. In 'Cam Nesaf', for example, pupils with social and emotional difficulties are supported well through a curriculum that includes sensory activities and relevant alternative qualifications. At Key Stage 4, pupils can study a comprehensive range of both academic and vocational courses, including engineering, photography, construction, media and textiles. However, processes to provide advice and guidance to pupils and parents regarding post-16 options are not sufficiently co-ordinated or communicated.

The school is developing an appropriate vision for the Curriculum for Wales that reflects its local area and beyond. It has started to work with cluster primary schools to ensure that staff have a common understanding of how pupils' skills and knowledge should develop over time.

The school does not have a sufficiently effective approach to developing the full range of pupils' skills. For example, its provision to develop pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum is underdeveloped. In particular, pupils do not have enough opportunities to complete meaningful extended writing tasks in different subjects. The school does not have a sufficiently coherent approach to improving the technical accuracy of pupils' writing and does not offer enough opportunities for pupils to improve their reading skills across the curriculum.

In a few subjects, pupils have suitable opportunities to use their numeracy skills. However, there is not a sufficiently co-ordinated approach to the progressive development of these skills across the curriculum. Provision to develop pupils' digital skills is underdeveloped. The whole-school approach to developing Welsh language skills and an understanding of Welsh identity and heritage is limited. A very few pupils do not currently attend any Welsh lessons.

Pupils are offered a variety of beneficial enrichment opportunities outside lesson time. The school library, for example, offers a useful opportunity for pupils to practise their reading and writing skills; lunchtime activities include the Quiz Club and the Creative Writing Club.

Care, support and guidance

Staff at Connah's Quay High School foster a nurturing, inclusive environment. They have developed a suitably wide range of provision – supported appropriately by external partners such as the police and health agencies – to support pupils with their personal, social, and emotional well-being. In general, pupils value the support that is offered to them. However, the school's provision for care, support and guidance does not have a consistent enough impact on pupils' attendance or engagement in learning.

The ALN team support pupils with additional needs well with a range of tailored provision. They provide beneficial guidance for teachers, such as the ALN website, one-page profiles and individual provision maps. However, teachers do not make sufficient use of these resources to plan for the needs of these pupils in their lessons. The school has made sound progress in its transition to the new ALN system. Staff, pupils, their families and other relevant agencies contribute usefully to person-centred planning and review meetings.

The school provides beneficial support for pupils with English as an additional language. A designated team provide individual and group sessions for these pupils to develop their language skills. This has a positive impact on their ability to access the curriculum and communicate confidently with their peers. 'Cam Nesaf' provides effective support for pupils with social and emotional difficulties through individualised programmes, which improve these pupils' engagement in learning.

Leaders use a suitable range of strategies to track attendance and to support pupils and their families where attendance has been identified as a concern. However, these processes have not had sufficient impact on improving attendance since the COVID-19 pandemic. The persistent absence of a very few pupils is a concern.

The school's behaviour policy contains broadly appropriate guidance regarding rewards and sanctions. However, there is a lack of consistency in how staff manage behaviour and record incidents, and leaders have not developed a sufficiently strategic approach to promoting positive attitudes to learning. In particular, systems to monitor behaviour and provide suitable interventions are not clear, coherent or co-ordinated well enough.

Pupils benefit from a suitably structured approach to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Tutor periods and school assemblies are used appropriately to reflect on aspects of equality and diversity, for example through the 'Kindness Matters' initiative. The school provides valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their social skills through extra-curricular provision, such as sporting and cultural activities, 'Pride and Shine' and well-being clubs.

The school has an appropriate safeguarding culture. Pupils know who to turn to approach if they are worried or in difficulty. They benefit from valuable opportunities to share concerns with key staff members during weekly drop-in sessions. Leaders provide suitable guidance to staff about their responsibilities in dealing with safeguarding issues. All staff undertake regular safeguarding training at an appropriate level. As a result, staff are aware of how to keep pupils safe. The school

has sound safer recruitment procedures and ensures that all new members of staff receive safeguarding information upon appointment.

Leadership and management

Although most of the senior leadership team has been in place for several years, the school has had a number of different headteachers since the last inspection. The very recently appointed headteacher has a clear vision that he is beginning to share. This encompasses high achievement for all pupils alongside ensuring their safety and well-being. He is rapidly gathering a realistic view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement.

In general, staff understand the school's current priorities well and how their roles contribute to them. However, over time, roles and responsibilities within the senior leadership team have become inequitable and indistinct. As a result, it is difficult to hold senior leaders to account robustly and leaders do not always carry out their roles effectively enough.

Leaders use a suitable range of activities to evaluate the school's strengths and areas for improvement. However, although they recognise the need to improve teaching, the processes they use to gather and evaluate first-hand evidence focus too heavily on compliance with school policies rather than their impact on pupils' progress. As a result, senior and middle leaders do not have a precise enough understanding of the impact of teaching on the standards pupils achieve or the development of their skills. In addition, although leaders identify broadly suitable priorities for improvement, they are not always precise enough about the specific aspects of their work they are aiming to improve or about what success might look like. This limits their ability to monitor accurately the impact that actions have on pupil progress, plan for improvement or target professional learning to the best effect. Overall, leaders do not evaluate with sufficient rigour and have not identified important weaknesses in teaching, learning, leadership and other aspects of the school's work.

Although there are regular meetings between senior and middle leaders, with consistent areas for discussion, senior leaders do not hold middle leaders to account robustly enough. The variability in the quality of support and challenge hinders the development of middle leaders and their capacity to secure improvement in their areas of responsibility.

Overall, there are suitable links between performance management, the school's priorities for improvement and professional learning. The school provides staff with an appropriate range of professional learning opportunities, including preparation for the Curriculum for Wales, external courses and opportunities to share good practice. For example, the assistant ALNCOs provide regular valuable professional learning opportunities for learning support workers, which helps them to successfully implement specialist strategies to support pupils with ALN. However, leaders do not evaluate the impact of professional learning well enough. In addition, they do not identify precisely enough the professional learning needed to improve teaching and other important aspects of the school's work.

Leaders communicate regularly with parents. However, a minority of parents feel that communication, for example reports on pupils' progress, is sometimes unclear and

the school does not always provide them with important information or in a timely manner.

The governing body supports the school enthusiastically and has taken some suitable steps to ensure that there are appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. Despite this, the canteen does not provide a wide enough range of healthy options. Although governors have a broad understanding of the work of the school, they are not provided with sufficient information to enable them to challenge all aspects of senior leaders' work thoroughly enough.

Governors and senior leaders monitor the budget carefully and have appropriate arrangements to spend the current budget surplus over the next three years. Grant funding is allocated appropriately to support pupils' well-being and learning, including those eligible for free school meals or from low-income households. For example, the school helps to provide resources and access to wider experiences for these pupils where appropriate.

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

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