



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

A report on

**Heolddu Comprehensive School
Mountain Road
Bargoed
CF81 8XL**

Date of inspection: May 2018

by

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

About Heolddu Comprehensive School

Heolddu Comprehensive School is an English-medium, mixed 11-18 comprehensive school situated in the town of Bargoed. The school serves the surrounding areas including Gilfach, Aberbargoed, Deri and Tirphil. Heolddu Comprehensive School works in partnership with five other schools and the local further education college to provide a joint sixth form.

There are 546 pupils on roll, including 83 in the sixth form. This compares with a total of 723 pupils, including 99 in the sixth form, when the school was last inspected in 2011.

Around 26% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This figure is above the Welsh average of 17% for secondary schools. Forty-three per cent of pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas of Wales. Around 21% of pupils have additional learning needs, and just over 1% have a statement of special educational needs. Both of these figures are below the Welsh averages of, respectively, 22.7% and 2%.

Almost all pupils are from a white, British background. Very few speak English as an additional language. Very few pupils speak Welsh as a first language.

The current headteacher took up his post in April 2014. Since then the headteacher has appointed a new senior leadership team. The current leadership team includes the business manager, a deputy headteacher and three assistant headteachers, one of whom is seconded to the team.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website at the link below.
<http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/Schools/SchoolSearch?lang=en>

Summary

Heolddu Comprehensive School is a caring learning community that promotes inclusivity and wellbeing successfully. Pupils are proud to belong to the Heolddu school community. Most pupils are courteous and respectful towards staff, visitors and fellow pupils. They behave well, arrive promptly to lessons and demonstrate positive attitudes to learning, although a minority lack suitable levels of resilience. During lessons, many pupils recall prior learning well and the majority make suitable progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills. However, a minority of pupils have underdeveloped literacy and numeracy skills.

Teaching has many strengths, in particular the constructive working relationships between teachers and pupils that help engage pupils and contribute well to building their confidence and self-esteem. However, in a minority of cases, learning activities do not challenge pupils of differing abilities well enough. The headteacher and senior leadership team share a sense of purpose and commitment to the school's values and ambition of 'Achieving Excellence Together'. However, there are a few important areas of the school's work, such as the consistency of teaching and the standards pupils achieve, where leadership has not led to sufficient and sustained improvements.

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

Recommendations

- R1 Raise standards, particularly at key stage 4
- R2 Improve provision for the development of pupils' literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills, especially their writing
- R3 Improve the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of assessment
- R4 Work to reduce the deficit budget

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will review the school's progress.

Main findings

Standards: Adequate and needs improvement

In lessons, many pupils recall prior learning well and the majority make suitable progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills. During their time at the school, many pupils make sound progress but a minority of pupils have underdeveloped literacy and numeracy skills.

Most pupils listen to the teacher and other pupils with attention and respect. The majority are able to provide brief though underdeveloped verbal responses to teachers' questions. A minority of pupils explain their ideas clearly, using appropriate vocabulary, for example when explaining mathematical processes such as simplifying equations or describing specific phases of sprinting technique. A minority of pupils lack confidence in their verbal skills. They are reluctant to offer their opinions without prompting and this prevents them from consolidating their understanding.

Around half of pupils use a suitable range of reading strategies to support their learning. This includes extracting relevant information from texts and, for example, reaching thoughtful conclusions about the benefits and disadvantages of talented young African footballers choosing whether to pursue their careers in Europe. A few pupils use inference and deduction well. These pupils identify persuasive techniques when looking at non-literary texts, for example on the banning of whaling, or when considering the presentation of characters such as Dracula in literary texts. A minority of pupils have underdeveloped reading skills that do not extend far beyond retrieving and collating relevant information from a variety of texts.

The majority of pupils write suitably for an appropriate range of purposes, for example to describe and explain particular events and to express their views. A minority produce appropriately constructed and mostly technically secure writing, for example when explaining their views about animals in circuses or on ethical matters such as euthanasia, and when composing formal letters and speeches. A few pupils produce well-constructed and technically secure written accounts. However, around half of pupils do not develop their writing well enough. These pupils make too many spelling and grammatical errors. Very few pupils take sufficient responsibility for proof-reading and improving the quality of their work before they hand it to the teacher.

The majority of pupils develop secure numeracy skills in their mathematics lessons. For example, a few pupils calculate the cost of wrapping a range of Christmas presents using their knowledge of the surface areas of specific shapes. The majority of pupils apply their numeracy skills suitably in other subjects, for example when using data in geography to produce charts that indicate the annual income for each country in Africa or to convert measurements of the density of water into different units. A minority of pupils lack confidence when applying their numeracy skills while a few pupils have weak skills and rely heavily on support from the teacher or other pupils to complete tasks.

Many pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) skills appropriately to undertake research, create interesting presentations and produce spreadsheets, for example using specific formulae to determine the costings for a particular enterprise. In technology, Year 9 pupils design and create attractive clock faces using distinct emblems and symbols. However, in general pupils do not develop their ICT skills sufficiently across the curriculum.

The majority reflect thoughtfully on particular aspects such as texture, tone and colour to analyse how artists such as Georgia O'Keefe, an American artist known for painting flowers, produce their work. Similarly, pupils create persuasive tableaux in drama, for example to illustrate the effects of bullying or to show how peer pressure can influence an individual's choice about using drugs.

Performance in the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics has fluctuated in the last four years. Performance improved significantly in 2015. However, performance has dipped in each of the last two years and has been below that in similar schools in this period.

Over the last four years, performance in the capped points score has been consistent and in 2017 is above that in similar schools. The proportion of pupils gaining five GCSE or equivalent at grades A*/A has been broadly in line with that in similar schools for the last two years.

At key stage 4 in 2017, although the performance of boys improved in around half of indicators, the performance of girls deteriorated in many. Over the last four years, the performance of boys and of girls respectively has generally been below that of these pupils in similar schools in the majority of indicators. In 2017, the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals improved in the majority of indicators. Over the last four years, performance for this group of pupils has generally been above that of these pupils in similar schools in the majority of indicators.

Pupils with additional learning needs make appropriate progress in line with their abilities.

At the end of Year 11, nearly all pupils remain in full time education, employment or training.

Over the last four years, performance in the sixth form has been inconsistent. In three of the last four years, the percentage of pupils achieving the level 3 threshold has been below that in similar schools. Performance in the average wider points score has been above that in similar schools in each of the last four years. In 2017, the percentage of pupils achieving three A*/A grades improved and is now above that in similar schools. Many sixth form pupils use prior knowledge well to explore and consider new concepts. For example, they use ICT competently to research and understand the nature and implications of aspects of malpractice and misconduct in the workplace.

In lessons, the majority of pupils make satisfactory progress in developing their Welsh language skills. The very few key stage 4 pupils who take the full course GCSE in Welsh achieve well. However, overall, only a minority of pupils achieve a level 2 GCSE qualification in Welsh.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Pupils are proud to belong to the Heolddu school community. Most pupils feel safe and say that the school deals effectively with any concerns that they have.

Most pupils are courteous and respectful towards staff, visitors and fellow pupils. They behave well, arrive promptly to lessons, and demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. Many apply themselves appropriately to a variety of activities and concentrate well. The majority of pupils persevere when they face difficulties or challenges with their work. However, a minority of pupils lack resilience and rely too much on the teacher for support. A few pupils lose focus in lessons and stray off task. As a result, these pupils make limited progress.

Many pupils work well in pairs and small groups, supporting each other's learning effectively. For example, Year 8 pupils co-operate well when organising small group warm-ups in physical education. They show maturity and suitable understanding of the key principles that are relevant to activities such as sprinting.

Most pupils are aware of the importance of a healthy lifestyle and develop a sound understanding of how to stay healthy through nutrition and exercise. The majority take part beneficially in the school's programme of extra-curricular sports clubs and recreational activities, such as kettlebells, rugby sevens and spin classes.

Pupils, including the sixth form leadership team, make a strong contribution to the life and work of Heolddu. This includes the school council's involvement in the educational and pastoral life of the school. For example, it helps to determine the school's core values and to influence behaviour policies. The sixth form wellbeing team helps to reinforce the school's values and culture enthusiastically. This group supports younger pupils well such as in their roles as mentors, reading buddies, and charity and sports' co-ordinators.

Most pupils develop successfully as ethical and informed citizens. They contribute valuably to raising money for local and national charities, such as the Rhymney Food Bank, Merthyr Tydfil Night Shelter and Books2Africa.

Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement

Although teaching has many strengths, overall, the quality of teaching is adequate and requires improvement.

Teaching at Heolddu benefits from the constructive working relationships between teachers and pupils that help to engage pupils and contribute well to building their confidence. In many cases, teachers set out clear learning objectives and organise useful introductory tasks that reinforce prior learning and help to set the context for the lesson. Many teachers have high expectations for pupils' behaviour. They use questioning suitably to determine pupils' knowledge and recall, and give helpful guidance to pupils to assist them with their work.

In the majority of cases, teachers provide clear explanations of new concepts and prepare helpful resources to support pupils' learning. These teachers reinforce key principles and plan worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy and subject-specific skills. In a minority of lessons, teachers plan a range of suitably

challenging tasks and have high expectations of all pupils. In a few instances, pupils have valuable opportunities to think carefully to solve particular problems such as in mathematics, where pupils consider the impact on the mean height of a squad of rugby players as a result of changes to the composition of the group.

Despite these strengths, there are important aspects of teaching that require improvement. In a minority of cases, learning activities do not challenge pupils of differing abilities, including those that are more able, effectively. In these lessons, the pace of learning is too slow and, for example, teachers do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to work independently or to improve and refine their skills. Too often, teachers' questioning does not encourage pupils to think more deeply or to develop their verbal and written responses.

In many lessons, teachers provide helpful verbal feedback that assists pupils to improve their work. Most teachers are beginning to use a common assessment approach that recognises where pupils have achieved well but also identifies those aspects of their work that require improvement. However, at present there is too much variation in the quality of assessment. In too many cases, teachers' comments about pupils' work are too generous and do not focus directly on their subject knowledge, understanding or skills. There is not a sufficiently rigorous focus on ensuring that pupils improve the quality of their work in response to teachers' feedback. As a result, overall, assessment arrangements are not contributing well enough to supporting pupils' progress.

The school offers an appropriate curriculum that builds suitably on pupils' prior learning. In both key stage 4 and the sixth form, the school responds flexibly to ensure that nearly all pupils can follow their preferred courses. The curriculum is adapted effectively to meet the needs of more vulnerable pupils. It supports this group of pupils well and enables them to secure positive outcomes. As a result, in the last three years, no pupil has left the school without a recognised qualification. In the sixth form, the school collaborates suitably with the local consortium to provide pupils with a broad range of academic and vocational courses.

Heads of faculty and subject teachers have identified appropriate opportunities for the progressive development of pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum. This approach includes the recently introduced cross-curricular thematic writing project in humanities in Year 7 that is designed to help pupils improve the quality of their writing. There is a beneficial reading intervention programme to support key stage 3 pupils with weaker reading skills. There are worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy skills in a minority of subjects. However, overall these approaches have not had enough impact on improving pupils' literacy and numeracy skills and raising standards. There are relevant opportunities for pupils to use their basic ICT skills across the curriculum. However, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to develop higher-level ICT skills such as the use of databases.

Provision for the development of pupils' Welsh language skills has not met the needs of most pupils or enabled the majority to achieve a level 2 qualification in Welsh. The school has recently modified the curriculum to provide a full course of study for all pupils in key stage 4.

The school provides a suitable range of extra-curricular opportunities that contributes well to pupils' personal and social development. This programme includes worthwhile opportunities for pupils to pursue creative and cultural interests in aspects such as art and design, photography, gardening, debating and technology, or to take part in educational visits such as geographical field trips to Iceland and Italy.

Care, support and guidance: Good

Heolddu Comprehensive School is a caring learning community that promotes inclusivity and wellbeing successfully. This approach reflects the school's principles of 'Be Ready, Be Respectful and Be Responsible'.

Well-planned transition arrangements with partner primary schools help most pupils to settle successfully at the school. There are appropriate systems to track and monitor the progress and wellbeing of all pupils. Staff use this information appropriately to identify pupils who require additional support. Parents are well informed about their children's progress. The school works closely with parents to address issues that may be affecting their child's learning and to help parents to provide extra support for them. These arrangements are contributing successfully to improvements in pupils' wellbeing, including their attendance and behaviour.

The school provides a highly-structured nurturing environment for those pupils that need additional support in their learning. Specific interventions such as 'Talk About' contribute well to improving pupils' social, behavioural and communication skills.

There is comprehensive and well-designed provision for pupils with additional learning needs. Helpful pupil profiles and personalised development plans assist staff to meet the needs of these pupils effectively. For example, specific interventions help to ensure that many pupils make good progress in reading. Overall, pupils on the additional learning needs register make sound progress in line with their abilities.

The school makes effective use of a broad range of professional support including external agencies such as educational psychologists, counselling services and mental health teams. This specialist assistance contributes well to vulnerable pupils' wellbeing and learning.

The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development appropriately, for example through tutor periods, assemblies and visits from guest speakers. The personal, social and health education programme contributes well to pupils' understanding of the importance of tolerance and respect for others, and to celebrating diversity. This programme encourages pupils to reflect on their personal values and responsibilities. However, the school does not meet fully the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship.

There are effective arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. These help pupils to understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle and how their choices will impact on their present and future wellbeing. There is a suitable range of educational visits and extra-curricular activities, including valuable opportunities for pupils to take part in sporting and recreational clubs, which enhances pupils' experiences in school.

The school provides valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their leadership skills, to contribute to decision making and to play a full part in the life of the school. Participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme develops pupils' team-work and leadership skills. The range of charity projects that pupils support contributes well to the development of their empathy and understanding of social and ethical issues.

The school provides helpful guidance and advice to pupils relating to subject options, educational pathways and future career choices. This guidance assists pupils to make informed choices about their future and in preparing them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management: Adequate and needs improvement

The headteacher has developed a clear vision for the school based on raising aspirations and helping pupils of all abilities to succeed. He is supported constructively by the leadership team. These staff work well together and share a sense of purpose and commitment to the school's values and ambition of 'Achieving Excellence Together'. This is contributing well to the positive morale of most staff and to the strong caring ethos of the school. However, there are a few important areas of the school's work, such as the consistency of teaching and the standards that pupils achieve, where leadership has not led to sufficient and sustained improvements.

Senior leaders' roles and responsibilities are distributed equitably and focus appropriately on raising standards and improving the quality of teaching. The headteacher holds senior leaders to account suitably through frequent meetings that include regular reviews of pupil progress and the quality of teaching.

There are clear line management arrangements for senior leaders to support and challenge middle leaders. These arrangements include regular timetabled meetings with relevant, common agenda items, which focus appropriately on monitoring the progress and wellbeing of pupils. However, a few of these meetings are not strategic enough since they focus too much upon largely operational matters and do not include sufficient, clear action points. The absence of relevant action points does not help senior leaders to hold middle leaders to account robustly enough. Most middle leaders carry out many aspects of their role appropriately. However, the effectiveness of middle leaders in securing high standards and improving the quality of teaching in their areas of responsibility varies too much.

The school has appropriate arrangements for managing the performance of staff. Objectives relate directly to the school's improvement priorities and support individual professional development well. The school challenges underperformance robustly.

A systematic programme of quality assurance activities draws on a broad range of first-hand evidence, including lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work. Leaders take suitable account of the views of pupils, parents and staff. Most leaders analyse data and identify trends in performance suitably. These processes provide leaders with a generally accurate analysis of the school's strengths and key areas for

improvement. In particular, leaders have a realistic view of current performance and the development of pupils' skills. At times, however, monitoring activities are not rigorous enough. For example, leaders have an overly positive view of important aspects of provision such as the quality of teaching since they do not consider sufficiently the impact on pupils' learning.

Leaders at all levels use the findings of self-evaluation appropriately to plan for improvement. The school improvement plan includes a broad range of relevant initiatives that address national priorities and those identified through self-evaluation activities well. Leaders set suitably ambitious targets for improvement and indicate clearly how they will monitor progress.

Leaders are creating a positive ethos and a strong culture of professional learning to support all staff. There is a well-planned programme of relevant development workshops, which reflects school improvement priorities. The school works well with other schools to promote good practice, for example to develop leadership capacity within the school. However, these activities have not led to sufficient improvements in key aspects of provision.

The headteacher, business manager and governors manage the school's spending carefully and make best use of the resources available to the school. Staff are qualified appropriately and deployed efficiently. Nevertheless, the school currently runs a licensed deficit budget. There is a suitable recovery plan to tackle this deficit that has been approved by the local authority.

The school makes sound use of grant funding, including the pupil development grant, to support vulnerable pupils, for example through the deployment of learning coaches and targeted mentoring arrangements. This has contributed to notable improvements in the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals and an overall improvement in the standards they achieve.

The governing body is supportive of the school and informed suitably about its performance, including through the recent creation of link governors. Governors have a sound understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and are beginning to provide a suitable level of challenge and support.

Copies of the report

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

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

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

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

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

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