



Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on
Sandfields Comprehensive School

**Southdown View
Sandfields
Port Talbot
SA12 7AH**

Date of inspection: February 2011

by

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



**INVESTORS | BUDDSODDWYR
IN PEOPLE | MEWN POBL**

During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the school's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

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

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Context

Sandfields Comprehensive School is an 11 to 16 English-medium mixed comprehensive serving the Sandfields area of Port Talbot. There are currently 625 pupils on roll. There were 702 pupils on roll at the time of the previous inspection in January 2005.

A total of 38.6% of pupils are entitled to free school meals. This is amongst the highest in Wales and is significantly above the national average of 17.1% for secondary schools.

Pupils at the school represent the full range of ability. Around 12% of pupils have statements of special educational needs compared with 2.7% for Wales as a whole. Forty-two percent of pupils have a special educational need. The school also has a very large Neath Port Talbot enhanced resourced provision for pupils with moderate, severe, profound and specific learning difficulties and some with autistic spectrum disorders.

The number of pupils who speak Welsh at home is very small. Ninety-seven percent of pupils are from a White British ethnic background.

The headteacher, deputy headteacher and one of the assistant heads were in post at the time of the last inspection.

The school's stated aims are to provide a caring, supportive and well-ordered community where effective teaching and learning can take place.

The 2010-2011 individual school budget per pupil for Sandfields Comprehensive School is £5,089, which compares with a maximum of £5,613 and a minimum of £3,747 for secondary schools in Neath Port Talbot. The school has the second highest budget per pupil out of the 11 secondary schools in Neath Port Talbot.

Summary

The school's current performance	Excellent
The school's prospects for improvement	Excellent

Current performance

Sandfields Comprehensive School is an excellent school because:

- the progress made by pupils by the end of key stage 4 is outstanding;
- the interventions to improve essential skills are highly effective;
- the level of care, support and guidance provided to pupils is extensive and enables teachers to teach well and pupils to learn effectively; and
- there is an exceptionally high level of consistency in the quality of teaching and assessment.

Prospects for improvement

The school's prospects for improvement are excellent because:

- the headteacher provides outstanding leadership to a very dedicated team;
- self-evaluation and planning for school improvement have a very good impact on standards and wellbeing, and involve all members of the school community, including pupils; and
- the school's ethos is highly inclusive in that all pupils are well supported and are able to make very good progress.

Recommendations

The school needs to:

R1 ensure that all pupils have the opportunity to gain a recognised qualification in Welsh in key stage 4;

R2 improve key stage 3 performance; and

R3 widen pupil choice in key stage 4.

What happens next?

The school will produce an action plan that shows how it will address the recommendations.

The school will also be invited to prepare a written case study describing the school's skills intervention strategies.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Excellent

Standards: Excellent

In the five years that pupils attend Sandfields Comprehensive School they make outstanding progress. The standards achieved by pupils in key stage 3 are average for the family, and pupils make satisfactory progress. However, by the time they reach the end of key stage 4 the improvements they make in developing their skills, especially their literacy skills, enable them to make significant gains, and pupil achievement is excellent.

At key stage 3, performance in the core subject indicator (the expected performance in English or Welsh, mathematics and science, the core subjects of the National Curriculum) has improved since 2009. In 2010 it was in the third quarter compared with the performance of similar schools on the free-school-meal benchmarks, and was similar to the average for its family of schools. In the previous two years performance had been in the lowest quarter. The trend of improvement is similar to that of the family. Pupils make generally satisfactory progress from the previous key stage.

In key stage 4, for the last three years performance has been in the first or second quarter of that for schools on the free-school-meal benchmarks for all main indicators. Performance is among the best of that in its family. The school has maintained a steady performance in the level 2 threshold (equivalent to five GCSEs at grade A* to C) including English and mathematics and the core subject indicator over the last three years. In 2010 it was first in its family of similar schools for both of these indicators. Over the last three years the proportion of pupils leaving without a qualification has fallen at a greater rate than the family average. When compared with their performance in the previous key stages, pupils make very good progress.

The school is very successfully narrowing the gap in attainment between pupils who receive school meals and those who do not. In key stage 3 the difference is smaller than the family average and considerably smaller than that for Wales as a whole. For all main indicators in key stage 4, the performance of free-school-meals pupils is average or slightly above that of the family. The performance of non free-school-meals pupils is above the average for the family. The difference is similar to that of the family and less than that of Wales as a whole. Pupils with additional learning needs, including the pupils in the enhanced resource provision, achieve better than expected outcomes.

In lessons, nearly all pupils make very good progress and this is a significant strength of the school. Pupils apply themselves well to tasks and display extremely positive attitudes to learning. They work very productively in pairs and groups, and independently. The pupils' work is well presented and well written, and demonstrates very good levels of knowledge, understanding and skills. In their books there is a wide range of good extended writing with generally accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar. Pupils demonstrate very good skills in reading for information and can

present this information in a wide variety of styles. They have very good problem solving skills.

A particularly strong feature of the school is the progress pupils make in skills. On entry to the school many of the pupils do not have the reading skills that enable them to access the curriculum effectively. However, by the end of key stage 3 only a few do not have these skills and by the end of key stage 4 nearly all have reached the expected level of competency. When the current Year 9 started at the school, around 73% had a reading age of below 10 years. The pupils have made significant gains and currently only 14% of the cohort have a reading age of below 10 years.

Increasing numbers of pupils are entering and achieving essential skills qualifications. In 2010, many pupils in Year 9 achieved essential skills qualifications in all three main skills of communication, application of number and information and communication technology. Around half of these achieved level 2 qualifications. Only a very few achieved no qualification.

In Welsh second language at key stage 3, results have improved over the last three years and are above the family average. In key stage 4, all pupils followed the full course qualification. However, the school only enters a minority for the qualification. Nearly all of those entered achieved a qualification in Welsh.

The proportion of pupils continuing with full-time education at the end of key stage 4 is similar to the local authority and Wales average. The percentage of pupils not in education, training or employment is lower than the average for Neath Port Talbot and Wales.

Wellbeing: Excellent

The extent of pupils' engagement in all aspects of school life is an exceptionally strong feature. Pupils are highly motivated and take great pride in their achievements.

Pupils' attendance level over the last three years is outstanding and places the school in the top quarter of similar schools in Wales and first in the family of schools. The school's permanent exclusion rates are very low. Pupils' behaviour in class and around the school is very good and nearly all arrive on time to lessons. They are enthusiastic and have extremely positive attitudes towards their learning. Pupils are courteous and relate well to one another, to their teachers and to other adults. Positive attitudes and exemplary behaviour enable pupils to make the best use of the learning opportunities provided by the school.

The school council and year forums are particularly effective in contributing towards self-evaluation processes and the development of key school policies, including the school development plan.

Pupils feel very safe and well supported in the school. They know whom to contact if they have any academic, personal or social issues to discuss. Pupils have a very good understanding of healthy eating and many take advantage of the opportunities

provided to improve fitness levels through participating in a range of extra-curricular activities.

Pupils take part in a wide range of community activities and have well developed social and life skills. They participate well in charity and community work which often includes meeting with local employers. This is helping them to move on with confidence to the next stage of their learning.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Excellent
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Learning experiences: Good

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum that meets the needs of pupils across a very wide ability range. At key stage 4, there is an increasing range of vocational and academic options at level 1 and level 2. However, a few pupils are not always able to study all of their preferred courses. In September 2010, the school introduced the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification at intermediate and foundation level. The school has productive links with many local employers and partners who offer valuable community and work placements that are well received by pupils.

The school has a comprehensive and extensive programme to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills through schemes of work, the language and mathematics workshops and the programme for essential skills qualifications. All of these strategies have a very positive and marked impact on pupils' reading and writing skills in particular. The school offers a wide range of academic, musical and sporting extra-curricular activities and participation rates are high amongst pupils of all ages and abilities.

The Welsh dimension is developing well across the curriculum and has an increasingly prominent place in the school. The annual school Eisteddfod is one example of how the school provides sound opportunities for pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding of Welsh culture and history. This complements activities in lessons. A minority of teachers use incidental Welsh during form periods and lessons and pupils are beginning to use Welsh greetings around the school.

The school is making good progress in embedding education for sustainable development and global citizenship. The pupils' eco-committee takes an active role in developing the school's environment. The school has links with teachers and schools in Bangladesh to widen pupils' horizons and to help develop pupils' understanding of global citizenship.

Teaching: Excellent

Teaching at the school is highly effective and has a considerable impact on raising standards with a particular focus on improving pupils' literacy skills. Teachers have very good, regularly-updated background information about the needs and progress of pupils. As a result, the quality of relationships between staff and pupils is exceptional. Nearly all teachers have extensive subject knowledge and many

skilfully question and support pupils to encourage them to give extended oral and written responses.

Thoughtful and detailed lesson planning effectively meets the needs of pupils and enables all abilities, including those in the enhanced resource provision who join mainstream classes, to make significant progress. All teachers have high expectations of behaviour and enthusiastically engage pupils in their learning. Teachers effectively deploy learning support assistants to support pupils who have a wide range of additional learning needs. This is impacting positively on their progress.

All books are marked regularly and in many instances written feedback to pupils is very detailed and most pupils have a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve their work. A school working party has identified and promoted effective assessment for learning strategies which all departments consistently apply to develop pupils' learning.

There is a clear system for tracking pupils' progress. Thorough analysis of data by curriculum co-ordinators, year co-ordinators and senior leaders successfully contributes to continued improvements in standards, particularly at key stage 4. Annual reports to parents provide suitable information about their child's attainment and progress. However, there is inconsistency in the quality of written comments. Most parents feel that they are well informed about their child's progress.

Care, support and guidance: Excellent

The school has a very well-designed pastoral and behaviour management system that teachers apply consistently. This system ensures that pupils are fully familiar with the school's expectations, and contributes to the excellent behaviour and the very high standards and wellbeing.

In addition, the school has an outstanding 'School Around the Child' programme. It works very effectively with a wide range of specialist services in order to meet pupils' learning, social and emotional needs. There are bases for social services and the youth inclusion service on site. This makes these services very accessible and ensures that issues are dealt with promptly and effectively. This provision has a significant and beneficial impact on pupils' academic progress, in particular for those who are vulnerable or at risk of disaffection.

Pupils with additional learning needs, including those in the enhanced resource provision, receive highly effective support and make very good progress. Most of their learning experiences are delivered and integrated within the mainstream curriculum. All pupils with additional learning needs have their individual needs met and are fully involved in all aspects of school life. Individual educational plans are used effectively across the school and learning support assistants are deployed well. The annual review process for pupils with additional learning needs satisfies statutory guidelines. Parents are kept very well informed and are fully involved with their child's education. The nurture group is also run very successfully and vulnerable pupils receive very valuable support. This impacts positively on their wellbeing and is a strong feature in the school.

The school's well-planned pastoral programme encourages pupils to make healthy choices and to understand the importance of wellbeing. The pastoral system ensures that parents and pupils receive very useful information on how to access support and guidance. Pupils receive very good information and guidance on option choices at the end of key stage 3. When pupils reach the end of key stage 4 they are fully informed about the academic and vocational courses that are available post 16.

The school has an appropriate safeguarding policy and procedures for safeguarding.

Learning environment: Excellent

The way that the school respects and celebrates diversity is an outstanding feature of the school. The school is a totally inclusive community ensuring that all pupils have equal access to the curriculum and all aspects of school life. The inclusive ethos, based on the principles of tolerance and respect, ensures an environment virtually free from harassment. The school is very successful in raising pupils' aspirations and challenging stereotypes in terms of their further education and future career opportunities.

The well-maintained accommodation meets the needs of pupils and provides a stimulating learning environment. Displays of pupils' artwork enhance the communal areas. There is an ample quantity of good quality learning resources. In particular, there is skilful use made of information and communication technology to support learning.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Excellent
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Leadership: Excellent

The headteacher provides strong and inspirational leadership. He is well supported by a highly effective management team. Leadership and management are based on effective team working at all levels and all staff readily take on leadership roles within a culture of trust and accountability.

Strategic priorities are strongly focused on high expectations and improving outcomes and wellbeing, and they include giving pupils a significant role in the development and management of the school. Aims and priorities are very clear and well understood. They are based on a thorough and detailed analysis of a wide range of evidence about performance and the impact of planned actions.

There are clear expectations about roles and responsibilities, well-worked out operational procedures and clear lines of accountability. This ensures a high degree of consistency in approaches to the school's life and work, such as when carrying out tutor roles and dealing with unacceptable behaviour. Within this framework, staff at all levels are given the opportunity to take on or expand their leadership roles, whether in leading teams or developing projects or tasks. Staff are trusted to carry out these responsibilities, but are held fully accountable for the outcomes. This is judged by assessing the impact of activities through first-hand evidence and any available data. These activities have had a very beneficial effect on standards, wellbeing and provision.

Performance is managed very effectively through well-established and comprehensive procedures. The system is used effectively to identify development needs which are well met through detailed planning and a wide ranging and targeted professional development programme. Any instances of weak performance or underperformance are tackled robustly.

Governors provide strong support for the school. They are well informed about performance, have a suitable role in setting the strategic direction and provide appropriate challenge where necessary.

The school takes full account of national priorities and in particular has made very good progress in improving skills and providing a significant role for pupils in its improvement strategies. It has made a significant contribution to the development of the School Effectiveness Framework.

Improving quality: Excellent

The school's systematic and rigorous arrangements for self-evaluation and improvement planning have a significant impact on improving standards, wellbeing and provision. The school has a very good record of improving provision and pupil outcomes. There has been significant progress in addressing each of the recommendations from the last inspection.

Self-evaluation draws substantially on first-hand evidence including a close analysis of performance data, comparisons with similar schools and prior attainment, lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work. This detailed analysis of outcomes is used to inform high-quality school, subject, pastoral and school council improvement plans. These improvement plans set out clearly the main priority areas, objectives, monitoring arrangements and intended outcomes.

The school has very effective systems to gather the views of all stakeholders, including parents. Improvement plans take these views into account and the outstanding contribution of pupils is a particular strength of this school. The school council contributes to the school development plan and has made a considerable impact by identifying areas for improvement. In addition, governors scrutinise the plans and monitor the process through the school improvement committee.

The school is an effective learning community. Nearly all staff demonstrate a commitment to continuous professional development and engage in a range of activities to improve their effectiveness. Professional development is focused on improving teacher skills and is linked to individual needs. The impact of this work can be seen in the way that pupils' skills are developed and the high quality of teaching.

Staff at the school are involved in professional learning communities with other providers and within the school. These focus firmly on sharing good practice. This work has a beneficial impact on assessment for learning, teaching and the development of pupils' essential skills.

Partnership working: Excellent

The school works exceptionally well with parents, the community, other partners and agencies to tackle the link between disadvantage and underachievement. The school's partnership with a broad range of agencies, including those based on the school site, to support more vulnerable pupils is an outstanding feature.

The school works very well and productively with a wide range of partners and takes a suitable strategic lead where necessary. This work, based on trust and good communication, includes joint planning and resourcing, and is closely aligned to the school's strategic priorities.

Arrangements with partner primary schools, including the use of pooled funding to employ a transition teacher, contribute effectively to the continuity and progression in pupils' learning. There are well-developed transition arrangements for pupils moving into post-16 education, training or employment. These include highly successful arrangements for pupils from the enhanced resource provision.

The school plays a significant role in the community and operates very successfully as a community-focused school. Its work with many community organisations and groups, including the on-site adult-learning centre, contributes to improving learning experiences and pupil wellbeing and progress.

Resource management: Excellent

The school manages and deploys staffing and financial resources very effectively. Expenditure is consistently monitored ensuring that available funding is matched to school priorities. The school is staffed very effectively to teach the curriculum and the deployment of teaching and support staff is well managed throughout the school. As a result, standards of achievement, wellbeing and provision are excellent.

The budget is controlled and monitored very well by the headteacher and school business manager. The school has a planned programme to provide the best standards of classroom accommodation and resources within the school's budget.

Systematic and accurate budgeting procedures are in place that allows resources to be effectively managed, and as a result the provision secures very good outcomes for pupils. The school provides excellent value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

Estyn received 51 completed questionnaires from parents or carers. Nearly all parents are very satisfied with the school.

Most parents said that their children are happy in school and they are helped to settle in when they started. Nearly all parents said that their children make good progress and that staff have high expectations.

All parents praised the teaching in the school, though a few felt that homework did not build on what pupils learned in school. Many parents feel that their children receive good guidance and support and that parents are kept well informed about their children's progress.

Most agree that the school successfully encourages pupils to be healthy, responsible and mature. Many parents consider that pupils are treated fairly and with respect. Most parents stated that the school is well run. Most feel that the school is welcoming to parents and many agreed that they knew how to approach the school if there was a problem.

Around three quarters of parents stated that children behaved well but a few disagreed.

Responses to learner questionnaires

Estyn received completed questionnaires from 40% of pupils selected at random from across the age range. Overall, the views expressed by pupils are positive. There is no marked difference between the views of boys and girls.

Nearly all pupils feel safe in school and most feel they have someone to talk to if they are worried. Most pupils say that the school deals well with any bullying. Most of the key stage 4 and many of the key stage 3 pupils say that the school teaches them to keep healthy and that there are regular opportunities for physical exercise.

Almost all pupils say that they are making good progress and that teachers help them when they have problems. Whilst many of the pupils in key stage 3 feel that homework helps them to understand and improve on work done in school, a minority in key stage 4 disagreed. Nearly all say that they have enough books and equipment.

Most boys and many of the girls say that teachers treat all pupils with respect. A minority consider that pupils are not well behaved. Many agree that the school listens to their views and makes the changes they suggest. Almost all pupils feel that the school encourages them to take responsibility and most feel that the school

prepares them well for the next stage in their education or work. Most say that the school helps them to understand and respect people from other cultures.

Most key stage 4 pupils say that they received good advice when choosing courses at the end of Year 9.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Sue Halliwell	Reporting Inspector
Catherine Evans	Team Inspector
Ray Owen	Team Inspector
Nigel Vaughan	Team Inspector
Penny Lewis	Team Inspector
Meinir Rees	Team Inspector
Edward Tipper	Lay Inspector
Alwyn Thomas	Peer Inspector
Tudor Griffiths	School Nominee

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Year groups and key stages

Schools use a common system of numbering year groups from the start of compulsory schooling to 18 years of age. This system emphasises the importance of continuity and eases communication among schools, governing bodies, parents and LEAs.

The term 'Reception' (R) refers to the year group of pupils in a primary school who reach the age of five during the academic year. Year 1 refers to the year group of pupils who reach the age of six during the academic year and so on. Year 13 is the year group of students who reach the age of 18 during the academic year.

Primary phase:

Year	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Ages	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11

Secondary phase:

Year	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13
Ages	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18

The four key stages cover the following year groups:

Key stage 1	Year 1 and Year 2
Key stage 2	Year 3 to Year 6
Key stage 3	Year 7 to Year 9
Key stage 4	Year 10 and Year 11