



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

**A report on**

**Olchfa School  
Gower Road  
Sketty  
Swansea  
SA2 7AB**

**Date of inspection: February 2018**

**by**

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

## About Olchfa School

Olchfa School is an 11-18 mixed comprehensive school situated in the west of Swansea. There are 1,700 pupils on roll, including 357 in the sixth form, which is slightly less than at the time of the previous inspection in 2011. The school has a specialist teaching facility on site catering for hearing impaired pupils.

Just over 6% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is well below the national average of 17% for secondary schools. Under 10% of pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas in Wales. Around 12% of pupils have a special educational need and 1.7% have a statement of special educational needs. Both of these figures are below the Welsh averages of 21.5% and 2% respectively. Nearly a quarter of pupils come from an ethnic minority background and just over 20% speak English as an additional language. Only a very few pupils are fluent in Welsh.

The headteacher has been in post since 2001. The senior leadership team consists of a deputy headteacher, five assistant headteachers and a business manager.

The school is currently a pioneer school and is working with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward developments relating to the curriculum.

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

Inspirational leadership, innovative approaches to curriculum design and improving the quality of teaching, and a consistent focus on developing pupils as confident and ambitious learners have been successful in securing consistently strong outcomes and high levels of wellbeing for pupils at Olchfa School.

Most pupils demonstrate extremely positive attitudes to their learning and behave courteously, respectfully and maturely. They are enthusiastic, ambitious and resilient learners. There are high levels of pupil participation in all aspects of school life.

Leadership arrangements are characterised by strong levels of rigour and robustness at all levels. The school has a strong focus on reflection and research and puts professional learning at the heart of its work. As a result, staff and governors have a secure understanding of the school's strengths and improvement priorities and the school has a strong track record in bringing about improvement.

<b>Inspection area</b>	<b>Judgement</b>
<b>Standards</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Wellbeing and attitudes to learning</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Teaching and learning experiences</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Care, support and guidance</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>Excellent</b>

## **Recommendations**

R1 Ensure that all teachers use consistently effective questioning techniques to challenge pupils' thinking and deepen their understanding

## **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 the planning, evaluation and ongoing improvement of its 'iLearn' curriculum, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

## Main findings

### **Standards: Excellent**

Nearly all pupils are confident and ambitious in their learning. They are highly committed to developing their knowledge, understanding and skills and, as a result, most make strong progress in their lessons. They demonstrate strong recall of prior learning and apply their knowledge and understanding well to new and challenging contexts. For example, they use their contextual knowledge of the United States in the 1920s when considering the changing role of women in American society, and apply their understanding of the principles of effective teamwork when developing their skills in basketball.

Pupils' communication skills are notably strong. Most participate enthusiastically and effectively in class discussion as well as group and pair work and use subject terminology accurately and appropriately. For example, pupils confidently use terms such as metaphor, personification, sibilance and fricative in a wide range of discussions about the effectiveness of writing. Most pupils share, develop and support each other's ideas well in collaborative activities, such as when they hold group discussions debating different interpretations of the results of a science experiment, and when Year 7 pupils exhibit high levels of maturity, empathy and sensitivity in discussing how to demonstrate kindness to their peers. Many pupils have an exceptionally strong grasp of a wide range of subject vocabulary and make highly mature, sophisticated and perceptive contributions to discussions. For example, pupils make a range of thoughtful and well-developed points when comparing the experience of viewing live theatre and electronic media.

Nearly all pupils have strong reading skills and are able to locate and select relevant information quickly and confidently from a range of sources. Most possess a wide range of reading strategies, which they use effectively when faced with unfamiliar words. These pupils use inference well when interpreting texts and make perceptive deductions, for example when analysing character traits in poems and stories. They can identify confidently the key features of different types of text. Many pupils are able to identify and explain various authorial techniques in fiction and non-fiction writing and can explain clearly their effect on the reader. For example, they analyse the different persuasive techniques used by charity adverts or consider the use of foreshadowing, pathetic fallacy and extended metaphors in 'Frankenstein'. The majority of pupils have well-developed higher-order reading skills and can summarise, synthesise and categorise various factors from a range of sources. In geography, for example, pupils analyse a range of multi-media sources to evaluate the social, economic and environmental impact of hurricanes on different countries.

The technical accuracy of most pupils' writing is secure. They write with a strong sense of purpose and audience in a wide range of styles and express themselves with clarity. This includes persuasive and empathetic writing supporting the views of the Suffragettes, evaluations of artists' work and discursive pieces to evaluate the success of Fairtrade. These pupils structure their extended writing well. Many pupils write at length with great sophistication, maturity and fluency and make good use of varied sentence structure and punctuation to enhance the effectiveness of their work, for instance when crafting highly original and engaging pieces of descriptive and narrative writing.

Most pupils have strong numeracy skills. They use these skills confidently across the curriculum. They collect, analyse and interpret data thoroughly and thoughtfully, and use this information to reach reasoned conclusions. For example, they conduct surveys on other pupils' eating habits and evaluate the healthiness of their diet, and calculate the range, median and inter-quartile range of pebble sizes when investigating the key features of river erosion. Most pupils demonstrate well-developed problem-solving skills and tackle a wide range of real life problems with confidence. For instance, they calculate the most appropriate ratio of ingredients in a butternut squash soup recipe and use loci to work out the most efficient way of rounding up cattle. Pupils use their information and communication technology (ICT) skills effectively across the curriculum, for example by using a range of software to design technology products and utilising spreadsheets to investigate whether there is any correlation between hand span and shoe size. They show strong levels of creativity and originality in many aspects of their work, such as when they hypothesise how the narrative of a poem will develop or when they design their own 'jukebox musical'.

Many pupils make strong progress in their Welsh language skills. They are accurate in their pronunciation and speak confidently. A minority of pupils produce well-written extended pieces in Welsh. In 2017, many pupils achieved a level 2 qualification in the full course Welsh GCSE.

Performance at key stage 4 has been consistently strong in recent years. In most indicators, including the capped points score and the level 2 threshold, including English and mathematics, the school's performance has been well above expectations. The proportion of pupils gaining five GCSE or equivalent grades at A\*-A has increased substantially over the last three years and is also well above the average for similar schools. The performance of boys, girls and pupils eligible for free school meals compares very favourably to that of their counterparts in similar schools. All groups of pupils make strong progress from previous key stages. At the end of Year 11, most pupils remain in full time education either in the school or a further education college.

In the sixth form, the proportion of pupils achieving three A\* or A grades is consistently well above that in similar schools. Pupils' average wider points score and the proportion achieving three grades at A\*-C have both been below the average for similar schools in recent years. In 2017, however, performance in both indicators improved substantially and is now line with that in similar schools. Most sixth form pupils demonstrate consistently high standards in all aspects of their work. They have very strong subject knowledge, which they apply confidently to new and challenging contexts. These pupils are highly articulate and make thoughtful and perceptive contributions to discussions. For example, in English literature, pupils use their detailed knowledge of Philip Larkin's life and work to construct a sophisticated analysis of the imagery and allusions in 'Dockery and Son', supported by specific and pertinent references to other poems that they have studied.

### **Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Excellent**

Pupils thrive in Olchfa School's caring, supportive and inclusive environment. Most feel happy and safe in school and demonstrate high levels of engagement and well-developed social skills in both their learning and their participation in school life.

Positive and trusting relationships between pupils and staff contribute significantly to high levels of wellbeing.

Nearly all pupils are polite, courteous and respectful. They interact positively and maturely with staff, peers and visitors to the school. Most demonstrate exemplary behaviour in lessons and around the school. In lessons, most pupils exhibit outstanding attitudes to their learning and show great pride in their work. They are determined and ambitious learners who are resilient when posed with challenging tasks and show great independence in all activities.

Most pupils are highly effective in pair or group work. In collaborative activities, they listen carefully and respectfully to each other and offer mature and sensitive support and challenge to their peers' ideas. They have a well-developed understanding of a wide range of ethical and global issues.

There are high levels of pupil participation in all aspects of school life. Pupils take an active and enthusiastic role in decision-making. They have been influential in making changes to, for example, the personal and social education programme and the 'iLearn' curriculum. Many pupils develop their leadership skills well in a wide range of representative groups such as the 'Voices of Olchfa' and the 'Rights Steering Group'. The support provided by pupils to their peers is a strong feature of the school's work. Sixth form 'buddies' help younger pupils to develop their literacy and numeracy skills, and the 'CHAT' group provides valuable support to other pupils regarding personal and social issues.

Most pupils demonstrate a secure understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle. There are high levels of participation in the wide range of extra-curricular sporting activities, such as after-school sessions in 'Calon', the school gym. Many pupils exhibit strong levels of creativity, both in their class work and through participation in the wide variety of cultural extra-curricular activities, such as musical productions and the creative writing club.

### **Teaching and learning experiences: Excellent**

Teaching is excellent and makes a strong contribution to pupils' wellbeing, personal development and the standards that they achieve. The school has been successful in developing collaborative and innovative approaches to teaching that are at the heart of its work.

Nearly all teachers establish positive working relationships with their classes that are highly effective in developing pupils as independent and ambitious learners. They communicate a passion and enthusiasm for learning and demonstrate professional expertise that is successful in securing high levels of engagement and progress.

In most cases, teachers are adept in carefully planning sequences of activities that build well on pupils' prior learning. They have a detailed understanding of pupils' abilities and interests and use this to plan engaging tasks that are challenging and stimulating. They use a wide range of approaches and carefully-planned resources to engage pupils in their learning. In these lessons, teachers demonstrate constantly high expectations and this helps them to secure consistently strong progress in pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills.

In many lessons, teachers use highly effective questioning techniques to challenge and develop pupils' thinking. They use these strategies particularly well to develop pupils' confidence in making contributions to class discussions. These teachers use a wide variety of approaches to support pupils' independence and resilience, and develop very successfully their confidence, creativity and ability to reflect on their learning. In a very few instances, teachers do not use questioning consistently well enough to probe and develop pupils' understanding.

Most teachers monitor pupils' progress carefully and are quick to address any misconceptions. They provide pupils with useful feedback about their work and how it can be improved. Many teachers ensure that pupils make suitable improvements to their work in light of their feedback. In the majority of cases, teachers are highly effective in ensuring that pupils reflect thoughtfully on what and how they have learned and make substantial improvements to their work.

Creative and effective approaches to the design of the curriculum are a notable strength of the school. The innovative, ambitious and carefully planned 'iLearn' curriculum provides key stage 3 pupils with an extensive range of stimulating and challenging learning experiences. It is effective in helping pupils to develop as reflective, confident and independent learners. The school, through its innovative 'research team' approach, continuously reviews and evaluates this curriculum. This ensures that the curriculum evolves successfully to match pupils' interests, ambitions and abilities.

At key stage 4 and in the sixth form, pupils choose from a wide range of academic and vocational courses. The extensive enrichment programme provides pupils with valuable opportunities to develop important employability and life skills. This includes highly beneficial activities such as 'beach clean', self-defence through jujitsu and sessions on 'DIY' and interior design.

The school provides an extensive range of valuable extra-curricular opportunities, including clubs, sporting activities and trips abroad and locally. These activities play an important role in pupils' personal and social development. For example, the '24 hours in the wild' expedition challenges pupils to undertake demanding group activities, reflect on their experiences and plan for the future.

The school has been highly successful in implementing the literacy and numeracy framework. There are many relevant and well co-ordinated opportunities across the curriculum for pupils to develop and consolidate their skills. Often, extended activities are carefully organised so that they integrate the development of several different skills through a series of thoughtfully planned tasks. The school has well-established systems in place to identify pupils with weak skills and it plans effective interventions to support these pupils. The school provides pupils with a wide range of beneficial opportunities to use ICT to support and extend their learning across the curriculum.

The school provides a wide variety of valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of Welsh history and culture. Many subject areas plan a range of activities that have a strong local focus, for example the study of the rejuvenation of Swansea and how the city was affected by the Blitz. The Welsh language is given prominence and celebrated visibly around the school. For example, the school deploys fluent Welsh speakers to be Year 7 form tutors, which builds successfully on the language skills developed in primary school.



## **Care, support and guidance: Excellent**

The school is highly successful in creating a culture of high ambition and an inclusive ethos framed around the vision of 'Dysg, Dawn, Daioni'. High expectations and the importance of respect and tolerance pervade all of the school's work. The strong commitment of all staff to supporting pupils' welfare contributes significantly to outstanding levels of wellbeing and personal development, and to the high standards that pupils achieve.

The school has comprehensive systems to monitor the academic progress and wellbeing of individual pupils. This helps the school to identify and address swiftly any barriers to progress. Specific programmes for pupils with emotional and social needs, such as those to help them manage their emotions or raise their self-esteem, are particularly effective in helping these pupils to find solutions to their personal challenges. A highly-committed team of pastoral guidance workers, learning coaches and learning support assistants provide a wide range of effective and carefully co-ordinated support for individual pupils. This work is supported strongly by partnerships with an extensive range of external agencies, including the ethnic minority support service and the community police. This comprehensive range of support is highly successful in ensuring that pupils at risk of disaffection remain engaged in their learning and achieve well.

Provision for pupils with additional learning needs is a notably strong feature of the school. The 'person-centred review' process enables the school to provide tailored support to help these pupils in lessons and through an extensive range of carefully targeted interventions. The school closely monitors the impact of its support for pupils with additional learning needs and ensures that this provision is responsive to the needs of these pupils. It supports very successfully the progression of these pupils to the sixth form, to further education and to employment or training.

The school's personal and social education programme, the Olchfa Pathway to Adult Life (OPAL), is highly effective in promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding and in developing their social skills. This programme is supported well by assemblies, outside speakers and opportunities for pupils to work with the wider community. The 'iLearn' curriculum provides pupils with regular opportunities to learn about and reflect on a wide range of ethical, local and global issues. The school has appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking.

The school is highly successful in encouraging pupils to participate in the life of the school and the local community. There is a wide range of opportunities for pupils to contribute to school life, such as the school council and other pupil-led policy groups such as the School Advisory Board. Sixth form pupils offer valuable literacy and numeracy support to younger pupils and the 'CHAT' group provides pupils with beneficial personal development by training them to offer social and emotional support to their peers.

Highly effective approaches to promoting positive behaviour have enabled the school to develop its pupils as enthusiastic, tolerant and respectful learners. Its innovative use of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child to provide a framework for this aspect of its provision is successful in helping pupils to feel valued, listened to and respected. The 'Newid' resource provides outstanding support for pupils with behavioural issues, which helps these pupils to be reintegrated into mainstream education where appropriate.

Arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

### **Leadership and management: Excellent**

The headteacher, ably supported by the senior leadership team, has provided consistently strong and inspirational leadership over a substantial period of time. This has been successful in securing outstanding outcomes for pupils and developing highly effective and innovative provision. He has a clear vision for the school, based on a passionate commitment to securing excellent standards and high levels of wellbeing for all pupils. This vision is understood well by all sections of the school community and permeates every aspect of the school's work. Leaders have established a strong ethos of collaboration, reflection and innovation. This has helped them to develop a detailed and accurate understanding of the school's performance and to take decisive and effective actions to bring about improvement.

Roles and responsibilities are distributed carefully and reviewed regularly to ensure that they focus clearly on the school's priorities and make best use of the skills and interests of individual staff. There is a well-established culture of reflection and research, which helps staff to evaluate their practice and identify how they can make improvements. Creativity and innovation are encouraged and supported strongly by leaders. This gives staff the confidence to develop new and more successful approaches to teaching and supporting pupils' wellbeing.

Leadership responsibilities are carried out with rigour and robustness at all levels. Leaders set high expectations for themselves, staff and pupils. Line management processes focus clearly on raising standards, improving pupils' wellbeing and providing all staff with a suitable balance of challenge and support. Performance management arrangements are used effectively to hold staff to account and to identify their professional development needs. Staff are encouraged to undertake educational research to support progress towards meeting their objectives, and this has a positive impact on the development of effective teaching and improvements to the curriculum.

The school places a very strong emphasis on professional learning. It provides an extensive range of well co-ordinated professional development opportunities for all staff. These activities are supported effectively by partnerships with other providers, including local universities. A notable feature of the school's practice is the work of the 'research team'. This group undertakes regular and thorough evaluations of teaching and learning across the school and identifies clearly how specific aspects of the school's provision can be improved. The school makes effective use of this research to identify specific training needs and develop its curriculum further.

Staff at all levels have a secure understanding of the importance of effective self-evaluation and improvement planning. Arrangements for the evaluation of first-hand evidence, including a thorough analysis of performance data, are rigorous and focus consistently on the impact of teaching on pupil progress and skills development. Consequently, leaders have a clear and detailed understanding of the specific strengths and areas for improvement in their areas of responsibility. They use this understanding to set improvement targets that are ambitious and align closely with national and school priorities. The school pays particularly close

attention to evaluating its 'iLearn' curriculum, including seeking the views of pupils through 'pupil champions'. This helps it to review and adapt this provision regularly so that it meets pupils' needs more effectively and develops their knowledge, understanding and skills.

The school has a strong track record in addressing national priorities, particularly in relation to curriculum reform and skills development. As a Pioneer School, it has worked extensively with other schools locally and across Wales to share these developments.

The school manages its resources very effectively. It has created a positive, stimulating and secure learning environment and makes best use of all the available accommodation. The headteacher, business manager and governing body monitor the school's finances closely, and ensure that all spending is matched closely to the school's priorities. The school uses pupil development grant funding well to support the wellbeing and achievement of vulnerable pupils.

Governors play a strong role in setting the school's strategic vision. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and improvement priorities, and offer valuable support and challenge to leaders.

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website ([www.estyn.gov.wales](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

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

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

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

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Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to [publications@estyn.gov.wales](mailto:publications@estyn.gov.wales)

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Publication date: 02/05/2018