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

A report on

**Archbishop McGrath Catholic School
Oak Tree View
Brackla
Bridgend
CF31 2DN**

Date of inspection: November 2019

by

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

About Archbishop McGrath Catholic School

Archbishop McGrath Catholic High School is an 11-19 mixed voluntary aided comprehensive school in Bridgend County Borough. There are 886 pupils on roll of whom 152 are in the sixth form. This is higher than at the time of the last inspection in 2013.

The school provides a Catholic education for pupils across the Bridgend County Borough, including Porthcawl, Maesteg and the Ogmore Valley. A small number of pupils also attend the school from the Vale of Glamorgan. Those who attend the school choose to do so because of the Catholic nature and character of the school.

Around 14% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is lower than the national average of 16.4% and around 23% live in the 20% most deprived areas of Wales. Slightly more than 11% have a special educational need and less than 1% have a statement for that need. Both figures are lower than the national averages.

No pupils speak Welsh as a first language and very few do to an equivalent standard. However, nearly 8% of pupils do not have English or Welsh as their first language.

The headteacher was appointed in 2015. The rest of the senior leadership team comprises of a deputy headteacher, four assistant headteachers and a business manager.

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

Archbishop McGrath Catholic High School provides a very caring and supportive environment, which most pupils are proud to be part of. The Catholic ethos, which recognises that 'every child is a unique individual, precious to God', is fundamental to all aspects of school life. Many pupils develop successfully as ethical, informed citizens. They learn to demonstrate respect and to promote virtues including gratitude and compassion.

Most teachers foster purposeful working relationships with their classes and demonstrate strong subject knowledge. Many pupils make sound progress in the development of their knowledge, understanding and skills. The quality of teaching makes a positive contribution to pupils' wellbeing and personal development, as well as the standards that they achieve.

In recent years, the school's leadership has been successful in supporting improvements in pupil outcomes, wellbeing, behaviour and attendance. However, senior leaders have not consulted well enough with staff about important changes and decision-making arrangements are not always transparent enough. This has contributed to low staff morale and made it difficult for them to carry out their duties as thoroughly as before.

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

Recommendations

R1 Improve consultation and communication, including around decision-making

R2 Increase the precision of self-evaluation processes at all levels

R3 Strengthen provision for the progressive development of pupils' skills

R4 Address the safeguarding issue identified during the inspection

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: Good

In lessons, many pupils make sound progress in the development of their knowledge, understanding and skills. They recall well prior learning such as algebraic principles and the characteristics of persuasive writing. A minority use their recall effectively to develop further their skills and understanding in different contexts. This includes, for example, recalling measuring and estimation skills and applying them successfully to monitor the cooling rate of boiling water in beakers insulated with a variety of materials.

Many pupils listen to the teacher and to their peers with attention and respect. This supports their learning effectively. A majority respond well to teachers' questions, use subject-specific language appropriately and are happy to share their opinions. Most sixth form pupils are extremely considerate listeners and develop their verbal skills well when, for instance, sharing their ideas on their skills challenge personal projects such as the effect of interior design on mental health.

Many pupils skim and scan suitably to locate information. In science for example, pupils improve their understanding of topics such as anaerobic respiration and use it to explain the concept of oxygen debt. The majority of pupils use inference and deduction well when considering Edgar Allan Poe's creation of atmosphere in 'The Raven' and the impact of reality television shows on people's body image. A few pupils do not use a sufficient range of reading strategies to support their learning.

A majority of pupils produce writing that is technically secure and structured suitably. They write in different formats including reviews of literary texts such as HG Wells' 'The Red Room'. They also demonstrate an appropriate sense of audience when writing various letters, including from a doctor to a patient informing them of their test results for diabetes, explaining the testing procedure and outlining the possible lifestyle changes they need to make. A majority of pupils review and improve their writing suitably. However, a minority continue to make too many basic errors and fail to take enough responsibility for proof-reading their work before they hand it in.

The majority of pupils have appropriate number skills such as handling fractions, decimals, percentages and whole numbers. They use their skills effectively in various contexts such as investigations in science, when they collect relevant data and draw appropriate graphs. When studying osmosis, for example, they carry out practical work to investigate how varying sucrose concentration changes the mass of a potato immersed in a sugar solution, and use their graphs appropriately to draw suitable conclusions. In addition, sixth form pupils make creative use of mathematical symbols, including pi, in fabric design as part of their 'Mathematics and Art' project. Many pupils show secure problem solving and thinking skills when, for example, matching travel graphs to descriptions of journeys.

Pupils generally develop their information and communication technology (ICT) skills appropriately across the curriculum. This includes making content and formatting choices in a web-design programme to promote anti-cyberbullying with younger pupils. Most pupils in the sixth form make efficient use of search engines, for example, they use Boolean connectors to help research their skills challenge personal projects.

Pupils make sound use of their creativity when, for example, in science they design and create their own space rockets from card and plastic bottles, then calculate their flight times after to launching the rockets with compressed air. In addition, pupils also develop their creativity skills well by composing harmonies in music and developing new ideas such as using Andy Warhol imagery to develop drag make up and vehicle tyre tracks to develop fabric design in art.

Over the period 2016-2018, performance at key stage 4 improved well. In 2017 and 2018, performance overall compared favourably with that in similar schools and pupils made good progress. Provisional data for 2019, indicates that this improvement and progress has generally been maintained including the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals which compares favourably to that of their counterparts in similar schools. Most pupils completed the skills challenge certificate. Nearly all progress to education, employment or training on leaving school.

The proportion of sixth form pupils gaining three A*-C, and three A*-A grades at A level or equivalent, over the three year period 2016-2018, compares well with that in similar schools. The provisional data for 2019, indicates that the performance of those following A level courses is well above expectation when compared to pupils who have a similar level of prior attainment in the last three years, though that of pupils following vocational courses is much weaker and below expectation.

The majority of pupils achieve a level 2 pass in Welsh. Their pronunciation is usually secure and a minority use new vocabulary and sentence patterns confidently. They produce writing that is structured suitably and have a good understanding of tense. Many pupils are able to read with understanding and use basic retrieval strategies to gather information about issues such as healthy living.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Most pupils are proud to be part of their supportive school community. Many develop successfully as ethical, informed citizens. They learn to embody respect and promote virtues including gratitude and compassion.

Many pupils feel safe and secure in school. Nearly all pupils understand the importance of e-safety and how to be safe online. A majority of pupils believe that the school deals well with any bullying or harassment that occurs.

Many pupils make healthy choices regarding their diet and participation in sporting activities outside of school. Many older pupils have a good understanding of how these decisions can affect emotional and mental health, and are aware of a range of strategies that can improve their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of others. A few pupils take part in extra-curricular sporting activities, such as netball and rugby, during lunch breaks.

Pupils, including those with additional learning needs, develop their leadership skills appropriately through, for example, membership of the Junior Chaplaincy who support well the local food bank, Syrian refugees and the shoebox appeal. In addition, sixth form pupils are generous with their time in leading a popular computer coding club in a local primary school. Learning ambassadors and the school parliament make a useful contribution to the life of the school such as when they

instigated a whole school mobile phone ban for pupils. This improved relationships and wellbeing across the school through increased interpersonal engagement and a reduction in the negative influence of social media.

Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school, although a few younger pupils require support in developing effective learning routines. Many are confident when interacting with new people and visitors. Occasionally, a few pupils' progress and that of their peers is disrupted by poor behaviour. Many pupils treat each other with respect and allow others to speak without interruption. A few pupils do not focus well enough when working independently, for example when given time to reflect on feedback and make improvements to their work. This contributes to unfinished work in a few pupils' books.

Most pupils have positive attitudes to learning. They arrive to lessons punctually, well-equipped and ready to learn. They generally engage well in their learning, sustain concentration and demonstrate determination and perseverance when given challenging tasks. For example, many pupils interpret collaboratively the poem 'Pigeons' by making links to prior learning and sharing their ideas about unfamiliar vocabulary. Pupils develop useful skills to improve their employability through, for example, their work towards the skills challenge certificate, by making presentations to the local business community on becoming dementia-friendly.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

Most teachers foster purposeful working relationships with their classes and demonstrate strong subject knowledge. This contributes beneficially to pupils' wellbeing, their skills development and the standards that they achieve.

In most lessons, teachers provide clear explanations and establish helpful classroom routines. In many lessons, they have suitably high expectations of what pupils can do and plan a variety of engaging and stimulating activities that promote pupil progress effectively. These activities build well on prior learning and are supported helpfully by carefully prepared resources. Many teachers provide appropriate opportunities for pupils to explore, share and develop their ideas and understanding.

The majority of teachers use questioning effectively to develop pupils' thinking and to assess their understanding. These teachers monitor pupils' progress carefully. However, in a few lessons, teachers do not use questioning well enough and talk too much. This hampers the pace of learning, restricts pupil engagement and does not develop pupils' independence well enough.

In the few lessons where pupils make rapid and strong progress, teachers have high expectations, ask incisive questions and ensure tasks are matched well to meet the needs of all pupils. This contributes to high levels of pupil engagement and a brisk pace to learning.

The impact of assessment and feedback to pupils is too variable. In many lessons, teachers offer useful verbal feedback and monitor pupils' progress carefully. The majority of written feedback from teachers provides pupils with helpful guidance on how to improve their work and opportunities to do so. In a minority of cases, this feedback does not have enough impact because teachers do not revisit and consider pupils' response to it.

The school provides a suitably balanced curriculum that builds well on pupils' previous learning and meets the needs of pupils of all abilities. The academic activity programme in Year 9 provides pupils with valuable opportunities to develop their understanding of the variety of GCSE courses available. Key stage 4 pupils are able to choose from a wide range of academic and vocational courses. The school works appropriately with local schools and further education college to broaden the curriculum opportunities available to students in the sixth form, and with a range of partners, to provide additional opportunities for all learners.

The school has effective arrangements to help pupils make a smooth transition into Year 7. Pupils from partner primary schools take part in valuable activities from Year 4 onwards. These activities help pupils to develop a range of skills that support their transfer to secondary school well. For example, literacy and numeracy transition arrangements for pupils are purposeful and focus on consistency of methods and teaching between Year 6 and Year 7.

Pupils benefit from useful opportunities to practise and develop a range of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills across the curriculum. Most subject areas plan worthwhile activities that enable pupils to apply these skills successfully in meaningful contexts. However, plans to facilitate progression in these skills are underdeveloped. A programme of effective, targeted intervention is in place to support pupils who have weaker reading skills.

The school provides beneficial opportunities for pupils to engage in suitable curriculum enhancement activities. These include local and international educational visits, sporting and academic activities and visits to the theatre.

The school offers relevant, useful opportunities for pupils to develop their appreciation of Welsh heritage and culture, such as residential trips to Glan-Llyn in the sixth form. Most pupils are entered for a Welsh language qualification at the end of key stage 4, although generally there are limited opportunities for them to develop their Welsh language skills outside of Welsh lessons.

Care, support and guidance: Good

Archbishop McGrath Catholic High School has a caring, inclusive ethos and provides valuable support and guidance for pupils. This has a positive impact on their wellbeing, learning and personal development.

The school is highly successful in developing pupils' spiritual values, which are fundamental to all aspects of school life. Pupils' involvement in the Catholic community within the school and within local parishes is a strong feature of the school's provision. Whole-school assemblies, weekly Mass, a retreat to Kintbury and a pilgrimage to Lourdes enhance pupils' understanding of their culture, the Catholic ethos and their sense of community.

The school promotes diversity and equality well and provides a worthwhile programme for pupils to develop their moral, social and cultural knowledge. This includes increasing their awareness of themselves as individuals and their contributions within the local community, Wales and the world.

Transition arrangements are very effective and provide valuable support for the most vulnerable pupils. The 'nurture group' for new pupils to the school provides a safe yet challenging environment and allows them to settle quickly.

The school has effective systems to identify and track all groups of pupils who are at risk of underachieving. As a result, pupils receive appropriate support and many make suitable progress. Although the tracking of wellbeing is at an early stage of development, the school has a valuable points system to record both positive attitudes to learning and behavioural incidents in lessons. This enables staff at all levels to offer appropriate support to pupils as required.

The school monitors pupils' attendance successfully and provides suitable interventions where required. These actions contribute beneficially to pupils' rates of attendance. Information technology lessons help pupils to understand how to stay safe online and the school has successful systems in place to deal with any instances of bullying.

The school makes appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking, as well as emotional health and wellbeing. Key staff have had suitable training to help them support any pupils with mental health issues. The school makes suitable use of outside agencies to provide additional guidance and support for the more vulnerable pupils.

Interim reports provide parents with useful information regarding their child's progress. In a minority of cases, annual written reports to parents do not contain sufficiently clear targets for improvement.

Pupils with a special educational need (SEN) are identified and supported well. Helpful one page profiles and person centred planning are shared well with staff and parents. As a result, pupils are set clear targets and teachers given useful advice on how to help the pupils to meet these goals.

The school provides a range of beneficial opportunities for pupils to take on leadership roles, for example as wellbeing and anti-bullying ambassadors. In addition, SEN pupils are encouraged to run a successful 'Helping Hands' friendship club each lunchtime for all pupils and previously an informational coffee morning to raise staff awareness of aspects of SEN. These opportunities help them to develop as active citizens within the school community.

The school provides pupils with appropriate advice and guidance to help them make informed decisions about their future learning and career choices. For example, pupils in Year 9 explore career development in lessons prior to choosing options. As part of an inter-state school partnership, it also provides opportunities for more able pupils to gain valuable skills including those to increase memory capacity and confidence.

Safeguarding procedures mostly meet requirements and there are no significant areas for concern. A safeguarding issue identified during the inspection was brought to the school's attention.

Leadership and management: Adequate and needs improvement

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school based on high expectations for all and underpinned by the Catholic ethos recognising that 'every child is a unique individual, precious to God'. This is communicated well to pupils, staff and parents.

Senior leaders have appropriately defined roles and responsibilities. They work together effectively to plan the school's key priorities and to support the Catholic ethos. The school's four strategic improvement priorities focus appropriately on leadership, standards, removing barriers to learning and the quality of teaching. A senior leader has responsibility for overseeing the delivery of these priorities. However, there is a lack of clarity and understanding in a few areas of responsibility, including assessment and the progressive development of pupils' skills.

Since the last inspection, leadership has been successful in supporting improvements in key areas of the school's work. These include pupil outcomes, wellbeing, behaviour and attendance.

Middle leaders understand their main departmental and pastoral roles and responsibilities well, especially in relation to raising pupil standards and ensuring their wellbeing and behaviour. Line management arrangements are clear and understood well. Middle leaders meet with their line managers regularly and although these meetings address operational issues well they do not focus enough on progress towards delivering the school's key improvement priorities, such as the quality of teaching. Middle leaders do not have a clear understanding of their roles in relation to important self-evaluation activities or when they are expected to complete them. As a result, they are reactive and respond to directives from senior leaders.

Senior leaders have not consulted well enough with staff about important changes. These include the decisions to stagger lunchtimes and to change the number and length of lessons which have resulted in several iterations of the school's timetable. As a result, heads of house are not always available and therefore able to deal with behaviour issues as effectively as in the past and teachers have had to make major alterations to their schemes of work at short notice. A few subjects have lost considerable teaching time, particularly in the sixth form. These uncertainties and the lack of consultation and communication, and insufficient transparency with decision-making, have contributed to low staff morale, a decrease in lunchtime activities and staff not being able to plan appropriate arrangements to carry out their duties as thoroughly as before.

Senior and middle leaders do not work together effectively enough to deliver the school's key strategic priorities. Middle leaders do not feel valued professionally or that their concerns are listened to. This has resulted in a lack of trust and respect between staff and senior leaders. Middle leaders do not have ownership of key areas of their responsibility, for example, self-evaluation and tracking pupil progress.

Governors know the school well and have a clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. They are very supportive, provide sufficient challenge to senior leaders and take decisive action to deal with underperformance.

The school has developed an appropriate range of self-evaluation activities to monitor the effectiveness of most aspects of its work. These include book reviews, classroom observations and collecting the views of pupils. However, many of these

activities concentrate too much on compliance issues and not on the quality or effectiveness of the activity. For example, lesson observations concentrate too much on the teacher's performance and whether actions have been completed or not. Most commonly, they pay very little attention to the effectiveness of the teaching, particularly to the progress made by pupils or to the development of their skills. As a result, the school does not have a detailed enough view of the strengths and areas for improvement in key areas.

The school has appropriate arrangements to evaluate the performance of staff. Performance management objectives relate appropriately to raising standards, but personal objectives are too vague and often simply state an individual's role and responsibility.

Many teachers and support staff engage purposefully with professional learning opportunities. Most teachers have participated in helpful school-based projects to improve pupil experiences, for example, improving classroom dialogue or considering the usefulness of success criteria. Staff are beginning to explore new approaches to teaching through research projects and in collaboration with other teachers internally. The school has a wide range of links with other providers, including local schools and higher education institutions that enhance the professional learning of staff.

The school uses grant funding effectively to provide a range of strategies that help tackle the impact of poverty. The school systematically monitors and evaluates the expenditure to determine the impact of spending decisions and to make sure there is good value for money.

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, to listen to them read 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
- visit a broad sample of classes, 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' wellbeing, 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 (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.