



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

A report on

**Porthcawl Comprehensive School
52 Park Avenue
Porthcawl
CF36 3ES**

Date of inspection: February 2020

by

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

About Porthcawl Comprehensive School

Porthcawl Comprehensive School is an English-medium 11 to 18 mixed comprehensive school located in the seaside town of Porthcawl. The school serves the community of Porthcawl and its surrounding villages. The number of pupils on roll is 1,221 which includes 229 in the sixth form. This is lower than at the time of the last inspection.

The school is currently working with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward developments relating to education reform in Wales.

Around 8.5% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is lower than the national average of 16.4% for secondary schools in Wales. Around 9% of pupils are on the special educational needs register, of whom less than 1% have statements of special educational needs. Both these figures are much lower than the national averages of approximately 23% and 2% respectively.

A very few pupils speak Welsh at home. Around 93% of pupils are from a White British ethnic background. Around 3% of learners speak English as an additional language.

The headteacher has been in post since 2013. He is supported by two deputy headteachers, one assistant headteacher, a director of studies and a director of progress.

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

Porthcawl Comprehensive School is a caring community that supports pupils successfully to become ethical and informed citizens.

The senior leadership team provides strong strategic direction for the school. Overall, leaders know their school well and set ambitious aims for their pupils.

Staff know their pupils very well and use this information effectively to provide timely support and guidance. In many cases, teachers plan appropriately and deliver engaging lessons. Strong support from staff has contributed well to positive outcomes for pupils at the end of key stage 4.

Pupils are able to participate in an extensive range of extra-curricular activities. A wide range of pupil-led groups provides exceptional opportunities for pupils to develop their leadership skills.

The school's comprehensive provision for health, wellbeing, social and moral development is enhanced effectively by contributions from a wide range of partners. Pupils are also given valuable opportunities to shape the school's curriculum and enrichment programme. Combined with the school's provision for personal development, this work supports high levels of wellbeing.

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

Recommendations

- R1 Reduce the variation in the quality of teaching and assessment, in particular with regards to the development of pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum
- R2 Widen the opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills
- R3 Sharpen self-evaluation and improvement planning so that processes focus consistently on the impact of teaching on learning

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on its work for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main findings

Standards: Good

Pupils make strong progress in many lessons in their knowledge, understanding and skills. They recall prior learning well and apply their knowledge securely to new and unfamiliar situations. For example, in geography, most pupils recall the physical features of river landscapes and explain the meaning of erosional and transport processes. In few lessons, pupils make exceptional progress in developing their learning.

When given the opportunity, many pupils respond clearly, fluently and with confidence to questions posed by teachers. They show a strong grasp of subject terms. A few make thoughtful contributions to class discussions that build well on points made by others. The majority of pupils extend their answers well when asked probing questions by teachers. Many listen well to teachers and their peers. However, in a minority of instances, where teachers do not probe pupils' understanding well enough, pupils' responses are often brief.

Most pupils extract information from texts successfully. Many use a suitable range of strategies to read for meaning or locate specific facts. Many infer deeper meaning well when analysing the writer's intention and a minority make detailed and comprehensive observations about the texts that they read. For example, in Year 9, English pupils make perceptive connections between their knowledge of the context of the novel "Of Mice and Men" and their own understanding of human behaviour. Equally, in sixth form lessons, pupils use their prior knowledge and understanding to make sophisticated comparisons between two unfamiliar poems by Christina Rossetti. They explain their interpretations and identify nuance highly effectively.

In a few curriculum areas, nearly all pupils write extensively, using appropriate structures, and accurate and expressive vocabulary. Most express their ideas clearly and write well for a wide range of purposes. Many pupils' writing is suitably accurate and they draft and redraft their work effectively. However, pupils do not transfer the writing skills they learn in English lessons often enough across the curriculum.

In mathematics lessons, most pupils perform calculations and apply their numeracy skills to worthwhile contexts successfully, for example, when calculating time within and across different time zones. Many pupils apply their algebraic skills accurately, for example when exploring straight line graphs. Across the curriculum, many pupils apply basic number skills effectively to calculate in suitable contexts. For example, in geography, they analyse population pyramids to calculate the number of people in each age range in Tanzania. In general pupils construct a range of graphs suitably across the curriculum. A few pupils are able to interpret these graphs well, for example to make connections between concepts such as Gross Domestic Product, literacy levels and population change.

Many pupils develop their information and communication technology (ICT) skills well. For example, pupils complete or create flow charts in mathematics, English and science. In music, pupils work confidently and efficiently with music technology to develop their own compositions.

Many pupils develop their physical skills effectively, for example when tasked with passing an object from person to person using only their feet in health and wellbeing lessons. They develop their creativity well. In music, pupils draw on their subject knowledge and skills imaginatively to devise short compositions. In a few subjects, pupils develop their thinking skills well. Many pupils in Year 7 humanities analyse and evaluate Chaucer's use of descriptive language in the Canterbury Tales to consider the development of language. In mathematics lessons, more able pupils apply higher order skills to new situations proficiently.

Many pupils are able to pronounce Welsh correctly. They apply their knowledge of the language independently to write suitable descriptive paragraphs about their local area. With support, many pupils are able to write appropriate extended pieces. However, they do not develop their understanding of Welsh well enough to write at length independently. Pupils use of Welsh outside of these lessons is limited and only a very few pupils are confident when responding to a greeting in Welsh. A majority of pupils achieve a level 2 pass in Welsh by the end of key stage 4.

In 2017, the school's performance at key stage 4 was generally in line with or above expectations in many indicators. In 2018 and 2019, outcomes were stronger and above or well above expectations in most indicators. The performance of pupils eligible for free school meals compares well to that of their counterparts in similar schools in 2019 after performing less well in many indicators in the previous two years.

In the sixth form, the proportion of pupils achieving three A*-C and those achieving three A* to A grades has fluctuated and is currently slightly lower than in similar schools. The average wider points score has improved well in 2019 and is now higher than in similar schools after being below in the previous two years. Overall, pupils make less progress from key stage 4 than national data would predict.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Most pupils feel safe around the school and that the school deals well with incidents of bullying. Nearly all pupils are courteous and respectful towards their peers, teachers and other adults.

Most pupils arrive punctually to lessons and settle well to their learning. Their behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Most have a positive and enthusiastic attitude towards their learning. They participate well in group and paired work. Many pupils work conscientiously on their own but a few do not persevere when the work becomes more challenging. In a few lessons, pupils are passive and do not engage fully in their learning. In these cases, they rely too heavily on their teachers to provide answers rather than employ their own strategies for developing their learning. A very few pupils ask questions that extend and deepen their learning.

Most pupils are aware of how to make healthy lifestyle choices and how these contribute to their physical and mental wellbeing. Many pupils take advantage of the beneficial range of sport and fitness activities, such as rugby, swimming and basketball. High proportions of pupils participate enthusiastically in community and arts activities. For example, pupils contribute actively to the annual school production which is performed at a local theatre.

Many pupils develop their leadership skills well through participation in the broad range of opportunities for them to make a difference to the life and work of the school. Around a quarter of pupils have specific leadership roles. They have a strong understanding of how their particular responsibilities make a contribution to the school. The Health and Wellbeing Feedback Group supports curriculum design by collating pupil responses to new developments, the Rights Respecting Group have presented at assemblies, and the Looked After Children Group have helped develop policies that take good account of their experiences.

Most pupils are aware of the importance of being ethically, informed citizens. For example, Year 7 pupils recognise how events in Welsh history have helped to shape today's society through their work in 'Our World'. The 'Interact Group' is diligent in its work supporting local and national charities.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

The school offers a wide range of subject choices that meet the needs, aspirations and interests of pupils well. This includes appropriate academic and vocational courses at key stage 4 and key stage 5. Worthwhile collaboration with the local college enables the school to broaden its offer at key stage 5, for example to include psychology and criminology.

As part of its work in preparation for the Curriculum for Wales, teachers are developing imaginative approaches to planning pupils' learning. In Year 7, creative schemes of work 'Our World' and 'Quadruple Literacy' are beginning to help pupils to make useful connections between different areas of learning and promote independent learning.

The school has purposeful arrangements to ease the transition for pupils from Year 6 to Year 7. Staff have developed effective partnerships with colleagues in primary schools to ensure that teachers' planning builds coherently from key stage 2 to key stage 3.

Pupils develop their knowledge and understanding of Welsh culture suitably. For example, they celebrate Welsh identity in the Eisteddfod each year. However, there are few opportunities to use Welsh language outside of Welsh lessons.

The school provides an extensive range of trips and visits to enhance pupils' learning, for example field trips to Iceland to study glaciers and volcanoes. The school provides pupils with beneficial opportunities to consider their future careers for example by inviting a wide range of professionals such as midwives, scientists, lawyers, medics and artists.

Nearly all teachers have strong subject knowledge. They manage classroom behaviour well. Most know their pupils very well and many establish strong and productive working relationships with them.

In the few particularly effective lessons, teachers plan meticulously and design imaginative tasks that capture the interests of pupils. They encourage pupils to think for themselves and link different areas of knowledge to deepen their understanding. Many teachers structure their lessons to build on prior learning and introduce new concepts. They plan a series of interesting tasks that build pupils' knowledge and

understanding progressively. For example, in geography, activities enable pupils to make perceptive comparisons of global cities, their coastal hazards and the way these are managed.

In a minority of lessons, although teachers plan suitable activities for pupils, they do not pay sufficient attention to developing their independence. These teachers do not encourage pupils to explore their own ideas or deepen their understanding enough. In a few lessons, the pace of learning is too slow. As a result, pupils become passive or uninterested.

A minority of teachers ask incisive and probing questions that challenge pupils' thinking. However, a majority of teachers too frequently use questioning merely to check pupils' recall.

In nearly all lessons, teachers offer pupils useful verbal feedback and guidance. These help pupils to improve their work. In the few best examples, written feedback is clear and gives specific and helpful advice about how to improve, and there is a clear expectation that pupils act upon this. However, in general, teachers' written feedback does not explain clearly enough how pupils can improve the quality of their work.

The school provides useful opportunities to develop pupils' ICT skills across many areas of the key stage 3 curriculum. For example, in English, pupils create video presentations for an enterprise challenge. At key stage 4, pupils use ICT to create, research and present work routinely across many subjects. There are suitable opportunities for pupils to use data logging to create large datasets and to analyse them effectively within science.

There is a useful detailed policy to support departments in their work to develop pupils' literacy skills. Subject areas have identified suitable opportunities for developing literacy in worthwhile contexts. There are beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills within many subjects at key stage 4, including effective use of exam questions to develop pupils' ability to respond successfully to extended questions. However, the quality of opportunities for pupils to develop reading, writing and speaking skills progressively across the school is too variable. For example, where questioning is limited to simple recall, pupils do not develop their speaking skills well enough. Equally, the use of overly structured workbooks reduces opportunities for pupils to provide extended written responses and extend their thinking.

There are beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy skills across the curriculum. Teachers in many areas plan helpful activities that enable pupils to apply these skills in increasingly meaningful contexts. Examples include measuring forces, creating data sets based on litter surveys in science, and creating graphs and analysing findings.

Care, support and guidance: Excellent

The school has strong arrangements to promote pupils' personal development. It has a clear rationale for provision that focuses on ensuring that pupils are happy, settled and developing as responsible, confident and independent young people.

Staff plan carefully how curriculum provision, extra-curricular activities and pupil leadership opportunities support pupils' health, wellbeing and their personal development. Staff involve pupils very well in the development of this provision. For example, there is a health and wellbeing pupil group helping to gather pupils' feedback about curriculum developments. Staff work well with other agencies to provide a wide range of tailored support for pupils.

The school provides valuable curriculum opportunities to help pupils make healthy lifestyle choices in its key stage 3 'Health and Wellbeing Curriculum' and personal and social education programme in key stage 4. This is well supported by the comprehensive training of staff in related aspects by specialist organisations. Most pupils are enthusiastic participants in the weekly wellbeing walk, physical education lessons and extracurricular sports. The school offers pupils an interesting and varied range of physical activities including Zumba, squash, Danish long ball, bench ball and dodgeball. The school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

The health and wellbeing curriculum, personal and social education programmes, religious education lessons, assemblies and registration period provision are comprehensive. They are well planned to support pupils' personal, spiritual, and moral development and their cultural knowledge and understanding. For example, the key stage 3 health and wellbeing curriculum includes a beneficial and age-appropriate range of themes that include 'Settling In', sex and relationships, human rights, democracy, the world of work and current events. This year the focus of this work is the Olympics.

There are valuable opportunities for pupils to participate in the arts and develop as creative and confident individuals. For example, the school hosts a particularly popular annual musical show, and there are choirs, an orchestra, vocal groups and instrumental bands.

Older pupils receive valuable careers advice and guidance and support for making choices and decisions about their next stage of learning. The school works well with the local college and Careers Wales to provide appropriate specialist advice and plan the next steps for pupils with special educational needs.

Leaders offer pupils valuable opportunities to express their views and to influence the school's work. There is a very wide range of leadership groups. These include sports captains, anti-bullying ambassadors, 'swogs' who promote the use of Welsh, the 'rights respecting school group' and the sixth form headship team. A particular strength is the way that the school ensures that pupils are prepared for their role. For example, the 'digital heroes' are planning to provide support in local care homes and primary schools so they are currently being trained in how to approach this task. Further, the anti-bullying ambassadors received external training and subsequently provided training for all staff at the school.

The school's systematic tracking of pupils' progress in learning and wellbeing enables staff to identify and respond promptly to underperformance and any concerns. Valuable systems for mentoring pupils provide purposeful support alongside successful interventions for individuals and groups of pupils. The pastoral team, student support centre staff and partnerships with a wide range of external

agencies provide extensive support for pupils to promote their health and wellbeing. These arrangements have a positive impact on outcomes, attitudes to learning and attendance.

There are effective arrangements to support pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and other vulnerable groups. Pupils are supported effectively when moving from primary school through frequent visits and the 'helping hands' programme. Staff use a range of information well to identify the needs of pupils, to set targets and to identify and implement strategies to support learners who require additional support. The learning support team provide all members of staff with a detailed and useful description of pupils' individual needs through one-'page profiles' and individual development plans. These include beneficial strategies to help staff support pupils' progress in lessons. Pupils, parents and professionals review these strategies regularly to support pupils learning, and their emotional and social needs effectively. However, a minority of teachers do not make enough use of this information to support learners in their lessons.

The school communicates appropriately with parents and provides useful opportunities for parents to develop their understanding of how to support their children, for example during valuable information evenings at each transition stage.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management: Good

The headteacher has a clear strategic vision for the school. He communicates this well to staff, pupils and parents in the school's mission statement, 'to provide a caring and disciplined learning environment based on mutual respect in which all pupils develop their talents to the full'. The headteacher's strong and decisive leadership over the past seven years has ensured high standards of pupil achievement, behaviour and wellbeing. The headteacher is ably supported by two deputy headteachers. They work together well to provide a clear direction for the school and a healthy, safe and secure environment that ensures the wellbeing of pupils and staff. They set high expectations for themselves, staff and pupils.

The headteacher, the two deputy headteachers and the wider senior leadership team work very well together to establish an effective team ethos among staff. In their everyday work, they model and promote positive behaviours. This leads to a supportive, caring and trusting environment where staff feel valued. Senior leaders have clear and appropriate job descriptions and their responsibilities are distributed suitably according to individual strengths and experience. They review these regularly to ensure a strong focus on the school's priorities. Senior leaders ensure that the work of the school contributes to key areas in the national priorities, such as developing approaches to the Curriculum for Wales. There are beneficial leadership development opportunities for middle leaders, for example secondments to the senior leadership team and opportunities to lead on whole-school projects.

As a group, pastoral and academic leaders are very supportive of the senior leadership team. Many understand their roles well and their responsibility to improve teaching and standards. However, a minority of middle leaders lack a detailed knowledge and understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in their areas of responsibility. Although middle leaders have focused on improving outcomes at the end of key stage 4, they have not placed sufficient emphasis on ensuring high quality teaching and learning in all subjects across the key stages.

The school has established clear and robust line management arrangements. There are regular and effective meetings to monitor and evaluate the school's progress on delivering its strategic priorities. These meetings focus clearly on pupils' progress and wellbeing, but have not had a sufficient impact on pupils' progress in a few areas.

Governors are well informed of the school's performance and support the headteacher and SLT well in delivering the school's strategic priorities. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They use this understanding well to challenge leaders where there is underperformance. They provide an appropriate balance between supporting the school and challenging leaders and managers where appropriate.

Processes for self-evaluation are well-established and comprehensive. The school ensures that all stakeholders, including parents and pupils, contribute their views to self-evaluation. There is an emphasis on gathering first-hand evidence, for example, from observations of teaching and from work scrutiny. The senior team undertake reviews of each faculty periodically. This helps senior leaders to have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in faculties and subjects.

Middle leaders evaluate the progress of pupils regularly. As a result, faculties know their pupils well, and staff are able to intervene to support individual pupils towards achieving their learning goals. Although middle leaders identify aspects of pupils' standards that require improvement, overall, self-evaluation processes are not sharp enough and do not link standards to teaching sufficiently. Middle leaders amass a large amount of information, but this process is not focused sufficiently on identifying the key areas of strength and development, in particular in teaching and assessment. Furthermore, their evaluation of teaching in their areas of responsibility is over-generous. They often rely too heavily on senior leaders' judgements of classroom practice.

There are clear links between self-evaluation processes and improvement planning. Overall, senior leaders identify clear and useful areas for development. The school has a track record of improvement in key areas such as improving performance in numeracy, and the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals. However, planning to improve teaching at faculty and whole school level is not sufficiently precise or strategic enough to meet the ambitions of the school.

There is a wide range of opportunities for the professional learning of staff. These include helpful whole school training days, opportunities to attend external training and events, visits to other schools and productive working groups of teachers. A few working groups have contributed significantly to school practice and provision. For

example, teachers across the school are developing their skills, knowledge and understanding of curriculum design well through collaborating to plan a project-based scheme of work for key stage 3 pupils. Another group of staff have worked effectively to develop practice and understanding to support pupils with additional learning needs.

The school is beginning to develop a culture of inquiry among its staff. A few staff have used the findings from their investigations to enhance practice. For example, in mathematics, teachers have explored how developing spatial thinking can support pupils' progress in numeracy.

There are suitable opportunities for teachers to develop their leadership skills, including secondments to the senior team, shadowing leaders and access to external training. However, leadership development does not focus well enough on developing the skills that middle leaders require to lead in their areas of responsibility. Although the leaders support staff well to engage in professional learning, in a few important areas, such as the development of teaching, this is not planned well enough to ensure consistent and sustained impact on classroom practice.

The governors, business manager and senior leaders manage the school's finances effectively. The deputy headteacher and business manager make sure that spending is matched closely to the school's strategic priorities. Staffing budgets are managed effectively and the school makes efficient use of teaching and support staff, for example by enhancing staffing in mathematics and English to provide additional support for pupils. The viability of the sixth form and the cost of delivering the curriculum at key stage 3 and key stage 4 are monitored closely to ensure that they are cost effective. The school makes effective use of grant funding to support pupils and to improve teaching and learning, for example the Pupil Development Grant, Education Improvement Grant and creative digital learning fund. As a result, the school has achieved a balanced in-year budget over the past four years with appropriate levels of reserves.

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.

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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Publication date: 15/04/2020