



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

A report on

Whitmore High School

**Port Road West
Barry
CF62 8ZJ**

Date of inspection: March 2022

by

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

About Whitmore High School

Name of provider	Whitmore High School
Local authority	The Vale of Glamorgan
Language of the provider	English medium
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	1082
Pupils of statutory school age	921
Number in sixth form (if applicable)	161
Percentage of statutory school age pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average <i>(The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in the secondary sector is 18.7%)</i>	19.4%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) <i>(The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in the secondary sector is 21.7%)</i>	16.4%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.9%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils with English as an additional language	0.7%
Date of headteacher appointment	September 2019
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	.
Start date of inspection	14/03/22
Additional information	

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: mylocalschool.gov.wales

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- (a) The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

Overview

Whitmore High School's philosophy is grounded firmly on the 'four pillars' that provide the basis for developing the whole child and which form 'The Whitmore Values'. This philosophy is advocated by nearly all staff who work to ensure that pupils are valued and listened to, are treated as individuals, and receive consistently good teaching and extensive opportunities outside lessons. This is so that they can succeed in their learning and nurture their passions and talents.

Leaders and staff foster a culture of encouragement and mutual respect where promoting positive relationships is at the heart of all of their work. This culture is tangible in the school and is shaping the positive social development of pupils. This is because many pupils take advantage of the valuable learning experiences and opportunities for personal development presented to them and grow to be confident and informed young people.

The school's inclusive and supportive ethos has a positive impact on the achievement of different groups of pupils. Those who need additional support benefit significantly from the integrated care, learning and well-being provision at the school such as the support hubs, the 'Successful Outcomes Centre' and the specialist resource base for pupils with an autistic spectrum condition. An extensive range of activities and extra-curricular clubs provide valuable opportunities for pupils of all ages and abilities to thrive, develop socially and learn new things. An exemplary feature of the school's work is the provision for more able and talented pupils through the 'Aspire' programme. Overall, pupils value the plethora of after-school opportunities that the staff offer and the impact these have on their well-being. Opportunities include mastering baking skills in the school bakery, working alongside the school's two therapy dogs, Daisy and Pilot, playing chess and being part of inclusive sports teams. As a result of these opportunities, many pupils are developing into resilient, independent and ambitious learners.

Overall, as a result of outstanding provision within the majority of subjects, many pupils make rapid and secure progress. A notable feature is pupils' strong oracy skills. Most pupils are confident, assured speakers who communicate with clarity and conviction. Most teachers use a consistent, research-driven 'direct instruction' teaching approach. This consistency is having a beneficial impact on pupil progress and classroom culture. Nearly all teachers know their pupils well and adapt their teaching to suit the context of each class.

The school provides a wide-ranging curriculum that builds effectively on pupils' prior learning. This is a strong feature considering the short life of the new school. However, there are a few areas where strategic planning is at an early stage of development. These include the planning for developing pupils' numeracy skills across the curriculum and opportunities for personal and social education (PSE) across the school. Opportunities to develop pupils' Welsh language skills outside the classroom and to celebrate the culture and heritage of Wales are limited.

The headteacher is an inspirational and motivational leader who, from the outset and despite the challenges of the pandemic, has galvanised the staff and created a strong sense of team. With the support of highly motivated leaders and executive

headteacher, he has established a clear philosophy to ensure that Whitmore High School is a place where staff and pupils work together effectively, enjoy their learning and reach their full potential. The school is particularly reflective and ambitious and has high expectations for all aspects of its work. There is a vibrant culture of professional learning and improvement and a strong emphasis on ensuring the highest possible quality of teaching and learning. This is a notable feature of the school.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve the opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills outside of their Welsh lessons and to learn about and celebrate the culture and heritage of Wales
- R2 Strengthen the strategic planning for personal and social education and the development of pupils' numeracy skills across the curriculum

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 case studies on its work in relation to its strong and effective practice for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main evaluation

Learning

Many pupils make strong progress in their learning and benefit significantly from effective teaching and assessment. In lessons, they demonstrate secure knowledge and understanding of subjects. They recall prior learning and subject terminology well and use this knowledge productively when they work independently and in small groups. For example, in drama, they use specialist subject terms when discussing how a character's motivation and objective is important for an actor.

Most pupils listen carefully to their teacher's presentations and instructions. They also listen attentively and respectfully to their peers' contributions to class discussions, answer questions or when pupils show their work.

Many pupils across the age range are confident speakers who offer detailed explanations. Many pupils respond well to teachers' questions and share their opinions assuredly, supported by well-considered reasons. They discuss and share their views confidently and support these views further with strong evidence. For instance, in history lessons, pupils discuss at length the notion that Columbus was a proud, optimistic and positive leader and ponder whether he was actually a hero or a villain.

A few pupils have particularly well-developed speaking skills. They use a wide range of vocabulary and detailed exemplification when presenting their views. For example, in English lessons, younger pupils discuss comprehensively the theme of absence and loneliness in the poetry of TS Eliot and Philip Larkin. Pupils in lower ability classes are also confident speakers. With beneficial support, these pupils develop their ideas well and expand on their responses with relevant examples.

Overall, many pupils read purposefully to locate and extract information from a variety of texts and sources. They skim and scan texts independently and summarise relevant key information well. The majority of pupils are able to infer meaning suitably from texts to identify the writer's intentions. They interpret a range of sources in order to identify or defend a viewpoint. A few pupils confidently analyse purpose and bias in historical sources. However, a few pupils do not apply reading strategies well to work out unfamiliar terms. Overall, pupils do not read aloud frequently enough across a minority of subjects.

Many pupils write suitably for a range of purposes. They structure their writing appropriately, organising their work into paragraphs and subheadings, and highlight and annotate texts suitably. The majority of pupils produce worthwhile pieces of extended writing. For example, they write detailed responses to literature extracts, referring to relevant quotations and stylistic features. A minority write perceptively, explaining their reasoning, such as when they explore the religious and non-religious views on attitudes towards abortion and the sanctity of life. Whilst around a half of pupils write with sound technical accuracy, a similar proportion make too many spelling and grammatical errors.

Most pupils make secure development in their numeracy skills in mathematics lessons and in a few other relevant subjects. In design technology, for example, many pupils use their numeracy skills well to calculate proportions when designing a drill bit gauge. In geography, many pupils interpret graphs accurately and identify patterns.

Most pupils make good progress in developing their digital skills in a few subjects. For example, they use software competently to rotate and annotate diagrams of jigs in their engineering lessons.

Many pupils develop their problem-solving skills appropriately in a broad range of subjects. For instance, they consider visual clues to work out the possible life story of a character or analyse the gross domestic product of Ghana and reasons for fluctuations. In international languages lessons, many pupils make productive use of their secure grasp of Spanish vocabulary to identify cognates and stem words to work out new and unfamiliar language. Younger pupils with less developed literacy skills who follow the 'Humanities Pathway' develop their ability to think independently when they consider reasons why Elizabeth should or should not have executed Mary, Queen of Scots. Those who are part of the more able and talented 'Aspire' programme make exceptional progress in their thinking skills, asking astute questions in live virtual sessions with international presenters such as a hedge fund manager from Hong Kong.

Many pupils develop their creativity and their physical skills well in relevant subjects. These include skills such as developing a character in a devised theatrical piece and designing innovative storage units.

The majority of pupils produce short pieces of writing in Welsh using a suitable range of vocabulary. They have an appropriate understanding of grammar to enable them to write with accuracy. Most pupils are able to use appropriate retrieval strategies to locate facts in Welsh language texts in order to answer basic questions. When there are opportunities, most pupils engage well in discussions in small groups and communicate successfully. Overall, pupils do not use Welsh often enough in other situations outside their Welsh lessons.

Most pupils in the sixth form make good progress in their chosen subjects and achieve their personal goals by moving on to higher education, training employment. They speak with confidence and maturity when they discuss their work and school life. A few are eloquent speakers who articulate their views lucidly. In general, many sixth form pupils develop sophisticated skills, such as in physics, when they use their algebraic skills successfully to solve complex problems.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Whitmore High School pupils develop successfully into responsible and caring citizens because of the strong ethos created by 'the Whitmore Values'. Staff model these values consistently in their interactions with pupils and, as a consequence, there is a high level of mutual respect and trust between all members of the school community. Overall, most pupils feel safe in school, know whom to turn to if they have any concerns and say that the school deals swiftly, effectively and sensitively with any incidents of bullying that arise.

Many pupils make a strong development in their social and life skills through the school's extensive enrichment programme. This includes a wide range of after-school clubs including the Olympic weightlifting, Endurance and Young Reporters clubs as well as considerable music, drama and sporting opportunities. Pupil participation rates in these activities are high. This is a significant strength of the school, which is highly valued by pupils.

More able and talented pupils benefit from the exciting opportunities afforded by the 'Aspire' programme. This helps them to develop into ambitious, knowledgeable and inquisitive young people. Pupils who need additional support develop valuable life skills from other opportunities, such as the school's bakery. These activities help to instil confidence and positive self-esteem in these pupils. Many benefit from a range of opportunities to develop their leadership skills. For example, pupils in the sixth form act as mentors to support the well-being of younger pupils. Pupils share their views regularly on aspects of school life through questionnaires and surveys. However, they are not always aware of how the school responds.

Most pupils behave well in lessons and around school and have positive attitudes towards learning. In the majority of lessons, behaviour is exemplary. Many pupils apply themselves diligently in lessons and show tenacity and resilience. They work independently of the teacher and take responsibility for their learning and progress. Overall, many are enthusiastic learners who work hard and persevere in tasks, however challenging they find them.

Owing to the coronavirus pandemic, we will not report pupils' rates of attendance. However, we have considered the school's provision for monitoring and improving attendance as part of inspection area 4 (care, support and guidance).

Teaching and learning experiences

Nearly all teachers know their pupils well and use information to adapt their teaching to the context of each class. They foster positive working relationships with pupils and manage their classrooms effectively.

Most teachers have strong subject knowledge and teach with enthusiasm. They have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and provide support that encourages active participation in learning. These teachers plan lessons effectively, organising knowledge and skills into sequential steps that build logically on each other. They have clear, appropriate learning intentions, which are shared with and understood by most pupils.

In many cases, teachers use a variety of highly effective questioning strategies to check pupils' understanding and develop their thinking. They create a culture in which pupils are not afraid of making mistakes or expressing opinions. They are good role models in the way they speak and use erudite language to communicate with pupils. Many support pupils' learning well through thoughtfully designed resources and targeted individual assistance. They demonstrate clearly what pupils are required to do so that they understand what is expected of them. In these lessons, teachers withdraw the level of support skillfully to develop pupils' independence.

A few teachers ensure that all pupils make rapid progress in their learning. These teachers have very high expectations of all pupils. They teach with pace and rigour, explaining complex concepts in ways that are readily understandable to pupils.

However, a few teachers do not reduce the level of support sufficiently to help all pupils increase their independence. They do not use varied questioning strategies to elicit more detailed responses from pupils in order to develop their literacy skills or deepen their thinking. In a very few lessons, teachers do not challenge pupils enough or maintain an appropriate pace.

Many teachers use a wide range of assessment methods skillfully. They give helpful verbal guidance to individual pupils as well as providing appropriate whole-class feedback to address misconceptions and errors. The majority of teachers provide productive lesson time for pupils to respond to their feedback and improve their work.

A minority of teachers design effective self-assessment activities in which pupils identify strengths and areas for development in their own work and then make immediate improvements. In these lessons, teachers make good use of pupils' work to model what successful outcomes look like. A few teachers use assessment particularly skillfully to further develop pupils' understanding. In a few instances, teachers do not check pupils' understanding carefully enough, leading to repeated errors or misconceptions.

The school plans comprehensively for the development of pupils' literacy skills. Leaders use data from internal and external tests extensively to identify and address key priority areas. Additionally, leaders plan for the beneficial use of tutor time to develop pupils' reading skills through an age-appropriate reading programme. There are beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy skills in a few relevant subjects other than mathematics. However, the school's strategic planning for developing pupils' numeracy skills and digital competence across the curriculum is at an early stage of development.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum that builds effectively on pupils' prior learning. Current curriculum developments linked to the Curriculum for Wales are closely aligned to the senior leaders' vision for developing teaching and learning. The school provides pupils at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form with a suitably wide range of courses.

The school's Personal and Social Education programme covers relevant issues such as healthy living and online safety but, in a few areas, the programme does not offer pupils a comprehensive enough range of learning opportunities. Although the strategic planning for provision of Personal and Social Education (PSE) is well-considered, it is in an early stage of development.

The school's arrangements for the Skills Challenge provide pupils with good opportunities to develop relevant life and social skills. However, provision for developing and celebrating the Welsh language, heritage and culture is underdeveloped.

The curriculum is highly effective in meeting the needs of individual pupils across all key stages. This contributes successfully to pupil engagement and well-being. The

school adapts the curriculum effectively to meet the needs of pupils with weaker basic skills. It supports these pupils effectively, for example through the 'Humanities Pathway', which reintegrates them into their mainstream classes. The innovative 'Aspire' programme challenges and inspires more able pupils in Key Stage 3 in areas such as science, literature and economics.

The school offers an extensive range of enrichment activities, which are exceptionally well attended, allowing pupils to gain valuable experiences that support their learning. This programme includes worthwhile opportunities for pupils to pursue creative and sporting interests in aspects such as art, journalism, self-defence and skateboarding.

Care, support and guidance

The school cultivates a highly supportive and inclusive ethos that promotes the well-being of its pupils successfully. Its inclusive ethos and strong culture of participation in learning and enjoyment is successfully reinforced by the 'Whitmore Values'. A well-established 'Culture for Learning' is valued by staff and pupils and has a significant impact on the positive attitudes and behaviour of most pupils. The school has effective and consistent procedures for dealing with any incidents of bullying and harassment.

An extensive range of extra-curricular clubs and activities provides valuable opportunities to promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils of all ages, abilities and interests. These include sports activities such as yoga, basketball, soft tennis, and non-sporting experiences such as the 'Aspire' programme, music and drama groups, the equality and diversity committee, and the coding club.

Support for pupils with specific and identified emotional, health and social needs is broad and varied, and is a strong area of the school's work. It provides support for pupils through internal counselling services, nurture facilities, and, where needed, access to specialist agencies such as the NSPCC and Barnardo's. The provision for supporting pupils' well-being and promoting their self-esteem is wide ranging and includes pet therapy and a pupil bakery. A weekly well-being bulletin gives useful information to all staff about any concerns.

Provision for pupils with additional learning needs is well planned and comprehensive at all key stages and reflects the priorities of the Additional Learning Needs Education and Tribunal (ALNET) act. Targeted small group and individual interventions include literacy booster groups and speech and language therapy. Most teachers' lesson planning considers the individual learning needs of all learners effectively. Pupil individual development plans (IDPs) are comprehensive and sensible. The school tracks the achievement of pupils with additional learning needs closely and plans suitable support for these pupils throughout their time in school.

The school's specialist resource base provides a safe and welcoming environment for pupils with complex needs arising from an autistic spectrum condition (ASC). Pupils are well integrated in the life of the school, and this gives wider benefit to the whole school community. The base provides comprehensive, individual, and aspirational experiences for pupils and is highly valued by these pupils and their

parents. The school's 'Successful Outcomes Centre' provides a suitable range of learning experiences and qualifications for a very small number of pupils who are unable to access mainstream education.

The school's approach to safeguarding successfully ensures a culture of safety and well-being, which is valued and understood by the whole school community. Staff understand their roles and responsibility in keeping children safe and there are suitable arrangements for staff training in matters relating to safeguarding and child protection.

Leadership and management

The headteacher offers Whitmore High School inspirational leadership. He is well supported by his extended senior leadership team. Together, they have developed a clear vision to support and nurture the passions and talents of each individual pupil in preparation for their future lives. This vision has been shared successfully with staff, pupils, and the governing body.

Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, school leaders and governors have planned and implemented rapid change successfully. They have engaged staff, pupils and other partners effectively in decisions. Together with the executive headteacher, they have successfully managed the amalgamation of two schools, the creation of a joint sixth form and the transition to a new building.

The headteacher fosters a culture of reflection and encourages staff to think about their practice and how they can make improvements. There is a strong sense of collaboration and team working based on continuous improvement. This has contributed significantly to the high quality of teaching across the school, the comprehensive well-being provision and pupils' positive attitudes to learning. However, strategic planning for the development of pupils' Welsh language skills and the celebration of Welsh culture is at an early stage.

Roles and responsibilities are generally distributed thoughtfully to make best use of individual skills. The headteacher has recently extended and strengthened the senior leadership team. This has increased its capacity to drive improvements in key priority areas. In addition, staff have been given specific leadership roles within the school which align well with their skills and interests.

Lines of accountability are clear and there are regular review meetings to monitor progress against departmental and whole school targets. Performance management is linked closely to school priorities and the development needs of individual staff.

The support and challenge provided to senior leaders by the executive headteacher and the governing body are a notable strength. Governors have a comprehensive understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and work in close partnership with the headteacher to realise the school's values and ambitions. The clearly defined committee structure enables governors to play an influential role in setting the school's strategic direction. Their plans for improving the provision for healthy drinking and eating are developing well.

The headteacher, governing body, executive headteacher and business manager monitor the school's budget very carefully and ensure spending decisions are aligned closely to development priorities. The pupil development grant and other grant funding are used purposefully to support the needs of vulnerable learners.

Senior leaders have a well-considered approach to gathering first-hand evidence about the quality of teaching. This includes formal lesson observations and frequent trips around the school to check how well pupils are engaged in their work. Leaders use a range of data well to identify areas for improvement in pupils' literacy and numeracy skills and to plan improvements in teaching and learning. Middle leaders know the strengths and areas for improvement in teaching across their departments well. They track pupils' progress in their subject knowledge and understanding and use this information beneficially to inform their improvement plans. However, they do not always evaluate the quality of teaching in light of the progress pupils make in their skills.

There is a vibrant culture of professional learning in the school, which is enhanced by its participation in initial teacher training. The school supports newly qualified teachers particularly well through a comprehensive induction programme. This includes valuable opportunities to observe practice in other schools and sessions to support their practice that are delivered before the school day.

Leaders offer staff a range of beneficial activities that help them keep abreast of findings from research to inform their practice. In addition, staff receive valuable opportunities to develop their professional knowledge through participation in gaining further relevant qualifications. Leaders offer particular staff the advantageous opportunity to become 'coaches'. They are given training to help them work with colleagues and bring about improvements in specific aspects of their teaching. Professional learning has a strong impact on the quality and consistency of teaching.

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 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, where appropriate
- visit a broad sample of lessons, 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' well-being, 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 (<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/>)

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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