



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

**A report on**

**St Gerard's School Trust**

**Ffriddoedd Road  
Bangor  
Gwynedd  
LL57 2EL**

**Date of inspection: May 2022**

**by**

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

**This report is also available in Welsh.**

## About St Gerard's School Trust

Name of provider	St Gerards School Trust
Proprietor	St Gerards School Trust
Local authority	Gwynedd Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent, co-educational mainstream school
Residential provision?	No
Number of pupils on roll	140
Pupils of statutory school age	134
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	04/11/2014
Start date of inspection	23/05/2022
At the time of the inspection all Year 11 and sixth form pupils were on study leave.	

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](https://mylocalschool.gov.wales)

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

## Overview

St Gerard's School places a strong emphasis on both well-being and academic standards. The well-being of each member of the school community is a priority. Leaders and staff have high expectations of both themselves and their pupils.

Pupils are proud of their school. They are listened to and feel that they can positively influence the work of the school. Pupils have a strong work ethic, and most are highly engaged and enthusiastic about their learning.

A prompt move to online provision, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic was refined throughout the periods of lockdown. This ensured that pupils learning continued and outcomes in public examinations remain strong.

The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum and within the challenges of its context as a small school, responds appropriately to the individual interest of pupils at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. However, the delivery of personal social and health education (PSHE) and careers are less well developed than other aspects of the curriculum.

Teachers know their pupils extremely well and in the best lessons provide a stimulating and creative learning environment. In these lessons a variety of well-paced activities, along with effective questioning by staff enables pupils to make strong progress and results in strong engagement and enjoyment of lessons.

The headteacher was appointed in 2017 and has worked along with his senior team as they faced the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic. The school has streamlined its approach to governance and the trustees are developing their role as a critical friend. In addition, the school has experienced a period of staffing challenges and as a result, there is some inconsistency in practice and not all new initiatives are embedded.

St Gerard's School meets all the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, needed to maintain registration.

## **Compliance with the regulations for registration**

Independent school inspections are governed by the Education Act 2002 and related regulations: the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. These regulations require an independent school to meet an appropriate standard in the following areas:

### **The quality of education provided by the school**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **The suitability of proprietors and staff**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **The provision of information**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **The manner in which complaints are to be handled**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

## **Recommendations**

R1 Strengthen the provision for PSHE and careers across the school

R2 Improve monitoring to identify and address where there is variability in provision

## **What happens next**

Estyn advises the proprietor to amend its current development plan to show what actions the school intends to take in response to the recommendations. It is also advisable to circulate this plan, or a summary of it, to all parents/carers at the school.

## Main findings

### Learning

Across the school, and in all areas of the curriculum, nearly all pupils make strong progress from their varied starting points. In lessons most pupils grasp new ideas quickly and most recall prior learning successfully. In the junior school, pupils develop their knowledge, understanding and communication skills well beyond the level expected for their age. In the senior school, nearly all pupils continue to develop these skills. Outcomes in public examinations are strong. The school consistently exceeds the national averages at GCSE and A-Level, particularly the number of A\* and A grades.

Pupils' communication skills are very well refined. Nearly all pupils are confident, articulate, and at ease discussing their work with their peers, teachers, and visitors. Many pupils speak with clarity, utilise correct grammar, and they appropriately adapt their language to the audience. Nearly all pupils listen attentively to each other and are respectful of others' views, for example when presenting family relics from World War 1. Pupils of all ages use appropriate scientific and technical vocabulary confidently, for example in mathematics when they discuss transformations or in French when they identify the correct tense.

Throughout the school, most pupils display strong reading skills alongside a love of books and literature. Younger pupils can successfully decode unfamiliar words and answer straightforward comprehension questions intelligently. These pupils' standards are above those expected for their age. As pupils reading skills progress, they read well to analyse, interpret and evaluate literature across a variety of different contexts, for example when contrasting accounts of events from different Gospels or reading from a script to record a blog in Year 5.

The standard of writing is very strong across the school and, as pupils get older, they develop the appropriate skills to write for different audiences and purposes. Nearly all of the youngest pupils can write three-letter words from memory accurately. They use their knowledge of sounds to try writing unfamiliar words. By the end of the junior school most pupils' writing is well constructed, correctly punctuated, and grammatically correct. It is often amusing and engaging, and covers a range of genres, such as poetry, playscripts, newspaper reports, or fictional stories. In the senior school most pupils develop the skills to be able to analyse, argue, and to write at length. For example, in the sixth form, independently completed research projects for their Extended Project Qualification (EPQ), display a high degree of critical thinking, accurate use of academic referencing, and draw upon a wide range of texts.

Most pupils at all ages, display strong mathematical skills. In addition, in a very few cases at Key Stage 2, pupils perform significantly above their age expected level. The youngest pupils can confidently double single digit numbers and recall their five and ten multiplication tables as far as 100. By Key Stage 4, nearly all pupils understand complex mathematical concepts, such as infinitesimally small numbers. Most pupils, when given the opportunity, successfully apply these numerical skills in a different context, for example when plotting the cross-section of a river in geography.

Pupils' digital skills are highly developed. Across the school, nearly all pupils use a variety of communication and software packages effectively. In Year 3 and Year 4, nearly all pupils use search engines confidently to find information, and subsequently produce digital presentations that contain both images and text. Most pupils in Key Stage 2 use coding enthusiastically to create their own video games that they evaluate with each other. In the senior school pupils use a wide variety of software, for example to record compositions and edit images.

Throughout the school most pupils develop their creative skills well. There are regular opportunities in the weekly assemblies for pupils to perform musically, including their own compositions. These pupils perform energetically and with increasing accuracy, for example when singing rounds and partner songs in up to four parts. Additionally, in the junior school, pupils perform in the school play enthusiastically.

Across the school, many pupils develop suitable Welsh listening skills, whilst their speaking skills are less well developed. For example, by the end of Key Stage 2, they understand information presented to them about a person's background, likes and dislikes. Many pupils develop appropriate reading skills throughout the school, for example to seek information in Welsh. For those pupils who choose to study Welsh at GCSE and A Level, outcomes are extremely high.

### **Well-being and attitudes to learning**

Across the school, nearly all pupils feel safe in a caring and nurturing environment where pupil well-being is a priority. They are proud of their school, which promotes a culture of tolerance, kindness and respect. Pupils are confident to speak to staff about any concerns and they know that problems will be dealt with swiftly and effectively.

Nearly all pupils have exemplary attitudes to learning. In lessons, pupils are enthusiastic, highly engaged and settle quickly to work without prompting. They have a strong work ethic and sustain concentration for an extended period. Many pupils are keen to ask and answer questions to extend their learning.

Nearly all pupils are articulate and contribute to discussions effectively. Many pupils demonstrate resilience and perseverance in problem-solving, as seen in Year 10 French and Year 9 history where the teachers support and encourage pupils to refine and extend their answers.

Nearly all pupils listen attentively to their peers and the teachers. Positive and respectful relationships are fostered. Pupils support each other well when working in pairs or small groups. In the Year 5 and Year 6 'Mini Olympics', pupils congratulate each other enthusiastically on their achievements. Pupils are kind and considerate when working in groups and cooperate confidently to progress. Most pupils are motivated by the developing school merit system and individual successes are celebrated with the Citizen of the Week Award and the Exceptional Effort Award.

Pupils in positions of responsibility or leadership roles, including those involved in weekly school council meetings, feel able to influence the school and make positive changes. For example, recently they have successfully negotiated with school

leaders to provide a new water fountain, introduce a tuck shop, purchase playground equipment, and develop a garden in memory of a former member of staff. Nearly all pupils feel that they are treated fairly and are listened to by their teachers and school leaders. For example, in Year 7 PE, the school proposed that girls play badminton and boys play rugby, but nearly all pupils were keen to participate in both sports, so changes were made to enable all pupils to experience both activities.

Pupils are respectful of the diversity of the school community. They have an understanding of and empathy for other cultures. This is reinforced in school assemblies, PSHE in Key Stage 3, and annual events such as the Eisteddfod. In the junior school, nearly all pupils develop as well-informed citizens. Across the school, nearly all pupils understand how to stay safe online.

Nearly all pupils are aware of the importance of making healthy choices and being physically active. There are prominent displays portraying the benefits of healthy lifestyles in the junior school. Pupils use the outdoor areas appropriately. For example, in PSHE, Year 5 and Year 9 pupils participate in rope and three-legged challenges.

Most pupils engage positively in a range of co-curricular activities, including sport, music or art, which have resumed swiftly once restrictions permitted. Many pupils participate in clubs that interest them, for example board games club, entrepreneur club, and nature club. Many pupils across the school take part in educational visits, for example, junior pupils visit the Welsh Mountain Zoo. In addition, most Year 9 and Year 10 pupils participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme

Owing to the coronavirus pandemic, inspectors will not report pupils' rates of attendance during the academic years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. Inspectors will, however, consider the school's provision for monitoring and improving attendance as part of inspection area 4 (care, support and guidance).

## **Teaching and learning experiences**

Teachers at St Gerard's have a genuine enthusiasm and passion for teaching. They have strong subject knowledge and make effective and relevant links across the curriculum to deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding. When teaching Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, teachers demonstrate a strong understanding of the requirements to achieve highly in public examinations.

Across the school, teachers know their pupils well. They use this knowledge to ensure that generally, approaches and activities are matched closely to pupils' needs. Where this is most effective, it is because teachers develop strong positive working relationships with pupils that are based on trust. Their sensitive support of and positive relationship with pupils is a strength of the school and has a positive impact on pupils' outcomes. Teachers successfully create a calm and productive working atmosphere where pupils feel valued, safe and ready to learn, but are still challenged to achieve as highly as possible. However, on a very few occasions teaching is not precise enough to challenge or support all pupils at just the right level.

Most teachers ensure that lessons are well planned and paced to match the learning of their pupils. Teachers plan a wide variety of classroom activities that successfully



and flexibly build on each other. However, on a few occasions, teachers' overuse of worksheets limit the opportunities for pupils to think for themselves and reduce both their engagement with and enjoyment of activities. In the best lessons, teachers use open questioning effectively to extend pupils' understanding. In these stimulating and creative learning environments, teachers use imaginative resources well, with links to real life examples wherever possible.

Teachers across the school provide pupils with high-quality feedback. Where pupils respond, this helps them to improve their work, for example correcting spelling errors. Teachers are keen to support pupils and, where appropriate, offer one-to-one support, to help move learning on. They have established effective mechanisms for tracking progress and sharing targets with pupils and parents.

Parents receive detailed and informative reports about their child's progress. These reports identify what their child has achieved and contain specific targets so they know how to improve. The timing of reports co-ordinates well with significant moments in a pupil's school journey, for example prior to Year 9 options. As a result, parents and pupils have a good evidence base upon which to make decisions.

The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum and meets the requirement for the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. In the junior school, since the last inspection the arrangements for the teaching of literacy and numeracy has strengthened and this has resulted in higher standards. In addition, some curriculum areas are effectively delivered through a topic-based approach. Furthermore, pupils benefit from specialist teaching in a range of subjects.

In the senior school, at both Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form the school's curriculum is tailored to the needs of the individual. Where possible the school provides bespoke opportunities to study subjects that pupils have an interest or a talent in, including creative iMedia, Welsh and further mathematics.

In the very best examples, the school curriculum is supported by detailed schemes of work. These build systematically on pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills to secure progression as they move through the school. However, not all schemes of work contain an appropriate level of detail. As such, in these instances, schemes of work do not always identify suitable opportunities for pupils to build their broader skills adequately, for example literacy, numeracy, or digital competency.

Throughout the school, the allocation of curriculum time for PSHE teaching is inconsistent. In addition, the planning for the teaching of PSHE for older pupils is undeveloped. As a result, pupils miss the opportunity to address important aspects of the subject.

The school offers a broad range of worthwhile co-curricular activities across the school, including sports, music and the entrepreneur club. In addition the school makes good use of the local environment. For example, Year 8 recently enjoyed a fieldtrip to study a local river.

## Care, support and guidance

The nurturing environment and pupil centred approach are strengths of the school. Working relationships between staff and pupils are highly respectful, caring, and supportive. The well-being of each member of the school community is a priority. All teachers meet regularly to discuss the well-being of individual pupils and share strategies to support both their academic and pastoral needs. In addition, many pupils support each other well, for example engaging with their peers on the friendship bench in the junior school. Where appropriate, the school engages constructively with external agencies, for example to provide specialist support for pupils' mental health.

Recently, leaders, in partnership with teachers, pupils and parents, have developed the school's provision for pupils with additional learning needs successfully. The new co-ordinator has worked diligently with individual pupils to identify their learning needs. She has delivered worthwhile professional learning sessions to raise staff awareness of strategies to support pupils. In addition, the co-ordinator works effectively with identified pupils to devise a useful profile of individuals' needs and plan for their future learning. The co-ordinator monitors the success of these plans closely. Where appropriate, she involves appropriate specialist support, for example the educational psychologist.

Leaders take good account of suggestions from pupils. The active school council provides worthwhile leadership opportunities for pupils across the school. Also, many pupils in the junior school enjoy opportunities to learn independently, for example as part of their lessons in global citizenship and life skills and the weekly enterprise club. Most pupils in Year 9 and Year 10 have the opportunity to develop their leadership skills through the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

Many pupils have regular opportunities to perform in music and sport, and staff celebrate these contributions with families through the school newsletters. The school celebrates its Welsh heritage proudly through the annual Eisteddfod where house choirs and musicians perform competitively. Junior school pupils take pride in their roles in the recent production of 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory'.

The school provides effectively planned assemblies, care, compassion and understanding are common themes for the year. In addition, assemblies such as Remembrance Day and Safer Internet Day reflect local and national events. Many pupils support their local community through charity work and this raises their awareness of people less fortunate than themselves.

In the junior school, there is a planned programme of activities relating to the world of work. Leaders provide appropriate careers guidance at Key Stage 3. However, the planned provision for cohesive careers guidance across the senior school is currently undeveloped.

Leaders are developing a sound culture of safeguarding at the school. There is a well understood system to report safeguarding concerns relating to pupils and the school makes referrals to outside agencies when appropriate. However, not all staff know who they should report to if they have concerns about the designated safeguarding person.

The designated safeguarding person provides all staff with regular safeguarding training. The school has thorough safer recruitment procedures and ensures that all new members of staff receive safeguarding training. A few issues relating to record checking were raised with the school and these were addressed during the inspection.

## **Leadership and management**

Leaders have high ambitions for all pupils and high expectations of their staff. Senior leaders are well-respected, visible and accessible. They have everyone's well-being at heart and are successfully developing a culture of safeguarding. The leadership team have complementary skills and share their many responsibilities appropriately between themselves.

Recently, the school has experienced a period of staffing challenges. The staff are a resilient and cohesive team, who work together well in the pupils' best interests. For example, during the early stages of the pandemic, staff adapted quickly to learn to use new IT platforms and develop ways of teaching and learning remotely.

Middle leaders have clear job descriptions and generally fulfil their roles diligently and professionally. They support their colleagues well, for example those new to the school or the teaching profession, through mentoring and regular, helpful departmental meetings. These ensure that all members of the department are kept abreast of deadlines and messages and have suitable opportunities for focused professional dialogue. Recently, smaller departments have worked collaboratively, and this has usefully supported middle leaders who may otherwise feel somewhat isolated.

Leaders monitor the school's work appropriately through a range of worthwhile activities. For example, there is an annual cycle of lesson observations and more regular work scrutiny. However, on a few occasions, leaders' monitoring of pupils' work and teachers' planning does not focus well enough on identifying inconsistencies between aspects of departments' provision across the school. As a result, for example in a very few subject areas, the quality of the provision is too variable between individual staff, or between the different phases of the school.

Lesson observations inform the annual staff appraisal process successfully. Leaders have refined and adapted the appraisal cycle. It provides a useful review of teachers' work and professional learning needs, along with a mechanism to quality assure the school's work and hold staff to account.

There is a coherent process for self-evaluation that broadly identifies the school's many strengths and few areas that may benefit from development accurately. All staff contribute to the report, which is presented to the trustees. The school development plan contains suitable priorities for improvement. However, the success criteria and expected outcomes are not clear enough, for example, to enable trustees to hold leaders to account for the plan's success. Nevertheless, the school has successfully addressed most aspects of the recommendations from the last inspection.

Newly appointed staff benefit from a supportive induction programme. In addition there are regular opportunities for staff to engage in worthwhile in-house professional

development sessions. As a result of the recent restrictions, many of these opportunities have been online. However, since the onset of the pandemic, only a minority of staff have chosen to engage in these activities.

In recent years, the school's trustees have overseen changes to the school's constitution and articles. Their review has resulted in streamlined governance arrangements, for example by merging the operational governors' meetings with the more strategic trustees board meetings. However, these changes are at an early stage of development and currently, their role as a critical friend is underdeveloped. Nevertheless, the trustees are extremely supportive of the school. They oversee its strategic direction and monitor the finances robustly.

The school meets all of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

## Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from parent/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and support staff through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors/proprietor(s), leaders 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
- visit lessons and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning
- 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 had 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 (where appropriate), 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 ([Estyn Website](#))

The report was produced in accordance with section 163 of the Education Act 2002. The main purpose of inspection under this section is to report on compliance with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003. In schools that provide non-maintained nursery education, this report also satisfies the requirements of Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

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:

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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