



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

A report on

Prestatyn High School

**2 Princes Avenue
Prestatyn
LL19 8RS**

Date of inspection: February 2023

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Prestatyn High School

Name of provider	Prestatyn High School
Local authority	Denbighshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	1448
Pupils of statutory school age	1196
Number in sixth form	221
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Secondary is 20.2%)	25.5%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Secondary is 17.8%)	25.1%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	1.9%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	1.6%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2016
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/10/2014
Start date of inspection	06/02/2023

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

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

Overview

Prestatyn High School provides a positive and engaging learning environment where nearly all pupils develop as happy, kind, and respectful individuals. The school is an inclusive learning community where pupils and staff work closely and effectively as a team and these relationships form the heartbeat of the school. Through its 'Engagement Centre', well-being room and partnerships with outside agencies, the school provides strong and well-considered support for pupils' well-being. As a result, most pupils feel safe and know who to turn to for support.

The school's curriculum is designed thoughtfully with the needs of pupils at its heart. Leaders have a deep understanding of the community they serve, and their commitment to ensuring that the school both supports and shapes that community is notable. Complementing the formal curriculum is a vibrant enrichment and extra-curricular offer, sometimes shaped and delivered by pupils themselves. Although areas such as the planning for the progressive development of pupils' skills is at the early stages of development, the school provides an inclusive curriculum, which offers something for every pupil, regardless of their background.

Where teaching is at its strongest, pupils make good progress. However, in a minority of instances, there is too much inconsistency in how well teachers plan to develop pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding over time and pupils are not challenged well enough. This limits the progress that pupils make.

The headteacher and his senior team have worked well to establish a culture of high expectations for all and shared well their vision that the whole-school community take positive responsibility for their actions and decisions. Governors, leaders, and staff care about their locality and strive to ensure that their school supports the community to thrive. Leaders gather a range of evidence to evaluate the school's work and generally have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement. Although leaders evaluate the quality of teaching, this is not precise enough to meet all their aspirations and plan for improvement.

Recommendations

- R1 Strengthen evaluation and improvement processes so that leaders have a more precise understanding of the impact of their work, particularly the impact of teaching on learning.
- R2 Ensure that teaching supports all pupils to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding progressively.
- R3 Strengthen the provision for the progressive development of pupils' skills.

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

Main evaluation

Learning

In many lessons, the majority of pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), make at least suitable progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills. Many pupils recall prior learning well and the majority apply this appropriately in new and more challenging contexts, such as when they develop an understanding of the Central Processing Unit (CPU) architecture in ICT. A few pupils make strong progress in their learning, for instance in English when they consider 'pathetic fallacy' to discover how the weather affects mood. A minority of pupils make limited progress, often as a result of less effective teaching.

Most pupils engage confidently and respectfully in conversations with teachers and visitors. They engage well in discussion about their work, and many are keen to share their ideas. They listen attentively and respond well to simple questions. A few pupils provide extended responses and explain their thinking well, including when they consider the reliability of evidence in the murder of Thomas Beckett. A few offer only brief, underdeveloped answers to teachers' questions.

Many pupils read simple texts and extract basic information accurately, for instance when they consider the feminist theory of crime in sociology. They annotate texts effectively to identify key words and relevant facts and statistics. In a few areas across the curriculum, when given the opportunity, a minority of pupils synthesise information well from a range of sources such as in history, when they gather evidence to investigate what caused the First World War and how it was resolved. A few pupils read aloud proficiently. They vary their tone and intonation to convey meaning and engage the listener effectively.

The majority of pupils write with suitable accuracy and control. They produce writing that is structured appropriately to convey their reasoning. When given the opportunity, they offer worthwhile extended answers. For example, they write coherently about their locality and identify the positive and negative aspects about where they live in French. In addition, when writing for a purpose, they display effective technical skill, such as in religious studies when employing argumentation techniques to explore whether religion is about solving injustice in the world. Although a minority of pupils write in an analytical and evaluative way, a similar proportion make frequent basic errors in their writing, especially errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. A few pupils struggle to communicate clearly in their writing.

In relevant subjects, many pupils develop their number skills well. They successfully use estimation and calculate with scale, for instance when designing tables in product design. They accurately carry out mental calculations, work well with fractions, decimals and percentages, and use probability trees suitably to calculate conditional and unconditional probabilities. Although many pupils use data to plot graphs using suitable scales, only around a half independently interpret the graphs or identify trends accurately. A majority of pupils have good understanding of the four rules of number and apply these well to perform a range of calculations.

Pupils use their digital skills suitably for a variety of purposes across the curriculum. They produce informative presentations, manipulate photographs, design web pages and research topics such as the advent of feminism. Overall, pupils develop their creative skills well. They create mood boards using primary and secondary colours and experiment with tints, shades and tones. In general, they also develop their thinking skills well. For example, in health and social care, they consider how to support individuals with specific needs in society to achieve a particular goal and in physical education they predict accurately the effect of a cardiovascular workout on their precision in landing shots in archery.

In general, pupils develop their physical skills well. For instance, they learn new sports and they use their fine motor skills to safely remove bones from chicken thighs when preparing meals in their catering lessons. Pupils demonstrate appropriate co-ordination skills, and they demonstrate agility by transitioning quickly from one movement to another.

In their Welsh lessons, many pupils participate suitably to develop their spoken Welsh. They pronounce words and short phrases clearly but often lack confidence to develop their contributions in class. Around a half of pupils make sound progress in their ability to communicate in Welsh. A few pupils offer more developed verbal contributions and a minority use beneficial reading strategies suitably to infer meaning from short paragraphs.

Overall, pupils in the sixth form demonstrate positive attitudes and engage well with their learning. Many recall previous knowledge securely and apply this to new and increasingly challenging contexts successfully, such as when in Spanish, they prepare a debate on whether Franco and the past should be forgotten in Spain. In general, pupils in the sixth form present their work confidently and evaluate the work of others skilfully and respectfully offering helpful feedback, for example when they choreograph a dance recital for themselves and other pupils.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all Prestatyn High School pupils are proud to belong to an inclusive school, which they describe as having a homely and wholesome feeling. They promote well the school's promises, which were jointly developed with the school's primary cluster, 'be respectful, be kind, be positive, be the best we can, and beat online hate'. As a result, pupils are polite and courteous to staff, peers, and visitors to the school.

Most pupils feel safe and happy when at school and enjoy being a part of the school community. There are high levels of mutual respect and trust between all members of the school due to the relentless focus on well-being. They engage well with the various activities that encourage them to reflect purposefully on their physical and mental health. When they need support, pupils visit the well-being room, which provides a calm haven where they benefit from participating in activities such as knitting, art therapy and meditation.

Most pupils say that they are free from bullying when at school and know who to turn to for support. Where rare incidents occur, pupils feel that the school deals with them swiftly, effectively and sensitively. Pupils engage well with anti-bullying contracts, which they feel support them successfully to deal with bullying and discrimination.

Nearly all pupils understand and respond positively to the school's fair and consistent approaches to behaviour. Most pupils work hard, are punctual to lessons and have high expectations of themselves, motivated by the school rewards system. Many pupils settle well at the beginning of lessons, engage purposefully with activities and have a positive attitude towards their learning. However, a few pupils are allowed to remain indifferent and passive during lessons and lose concentration too easily. Nearly all pupils take pride in the presentation of their work, and many respond suitably to their teachers' comments for improvement.

Most pupils understand how to lead a healthy lifestyle, including making sensible eating choices and participating in physical activity. They enjoy opportunities to discuss moral issues such as conflict, diversity, and the negative impacts of social media. Many pupils develop their physical and social skills well through the school's extensive enrichment programme. There are a wide range of after-school clubs that are well attended, including 'Animal Care Club' and the pupil initiated 'Volleyball Club'. The contribution that pupils make to the development of clubs is a notable strength of the school.

Pupils share their views regularly on aspects of the school. The active school council has a positive impact on school life including the changes to the school uniform and introducing halal meat in the canteen. Members of the sports council help staff in the physical education department to run extra-curricular activities. A few pupils in Year 9 develop their leadership skills well by acting as 'Buddies' to pupils to settle when they enter Year 7.

Nearly all sixth form pupils are happy when at school and have good relationships with their teachers and peers. Many appreciate the support and advice provided to help them make decisions about their future and most engage positively in extra-curricular activities to improve their physical and mental health. They respond positively to develop their leadership skills, for example when they engage in the 'Sixth Formers Protecting You' scheme that help younger pupils feel safe when at school.

Teaching and learning experiences

Most teachers are knowledgeable about their subjects and use subject specific terminology well. Many teachers plan appropriately to build on pupils' prior learning and to support their progress. This includes the planning of suitable starter activities, which engages pupils as they enter the classroom. These teachers build positive working relationships with pupils. They circulate the classroom effectively and offer valuable verbal feedback to help pupils focus and complete their work. Overall, teachers and teaching assistants work well together to support pupils with additional learning needs to make suitable progress.

The majority of teachers have sound expectations of pupils' engagement and the progress they make. They manage behaviour well to ensure that pupils participate positively in classroom activities. These teachers provide clear instructions and explanations to help pupils understand what to do in lessons. They use questions appropriately to help pupils recall their prior learning and provide helpful resources that support pupils to make suitable progress.

In a few cases, where teaching is particularly effective, teachers have high expectations of pupils' engagement and the progress they should make. They plan purposeful activities that motivate and challenge pupils. These teachers model concepts carefully and support pupils well to apply their knowledge, skills and understanding. They use questioning effectively to probe and monitor pupils' learning and adapt their teaching in response to how well pupils are progressing. These teachers address misconceptions promptly and focus on the quality of pupils' responses when providing verbal feedback. As a result, pupils make strong progress in these lessons.

In a minority of instances, teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. In these cases, teachers do not intervene when a few pupils become distracted or do not engage with activities. Often, their planning does not consider progression well enough. They plan undemanding activities or provide scaffolds and worksheets that lack challenge and limit pupils' opportunities to apply their understanding and skills independently. These teachers do not question pupils well enough. In general, their questioning does not challenge pupils to offer explanations or to develop their understanding.

Many teachers identify basic spelling and grammar errors in pupils' work. A majority of teachers offer pupils appropriate feedback to help them make improvements. However, the quality of written feedback is too variable. Often, comments are too general and do not have enough impact on pupils' progress.

The school has suitable systems to track and monitor pupils' academic progress. Reports to parents are suitably regular and contain helpful information. An annual report includes useful comments on pupils' strengths and areas for improvement in subject areas as well as personalised comments from members of the senior leadership team.

Prestatyn High School provides a curriculum that responds well to the needs of their community and pupils. The breadth of this curriculum is reduced in Year 9 to allow fewer subjects to be studied over a longer period of time. The school provides an extensive choice for pupils in Key Stages 4 and 5. This includes a strong vocational offer in areas, such as hospitality and small animal care, some of which are provided in partnership with the 'Coastal Alliance'. This gives pupils a rich range of learning experiences that broaden their horizons and increase their aspirations.

Following the pandemic, leaders have identified a decline in pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. In response, the school is beginning to revise suitably its planning to support improvements in pupils' skills. However, the provision for the progressive development of pupils' skills is underdeveloped and in the early stages of development.

The school's provision for personal, social, and emotional (PSE) development is comprehensive and contributes well to a culture in which most pupils feel safe in an environment that encourages tolerance and respect for others. This is informed by the work of pupil groups, such as the anti-discrimination and diversity groups.

The school makes effective provision for careers education and the world of work, including partnership with local employers. Working with external agencies ensures

that advice is impartial, and many pupils feel that the school prepares them well for their next steps in learning.

Extra-curricular activity and enrichment is a strong feature, where pupils are encouraged to participate in a broad range of activities, including those outside of the school day. For example, the archery, chess and dance clubs provide engaging opportunities where pupils develop their skills and build relationships with their peers. The school is committed to ensuring that social and economic circumstances are not a barrier to participation in curriculum visits including a criminology trip to a former prison in Shrewsbury and fieldwork for geography pupils in Iceland.

The school makes suitable provision for promoting the Welsh language and celebrates Welsh culture and heritage. For example, during the recent World Cup and through collaborative work with other local schools, they explore and celebrate what it means to be a citizen of Wales.

Care, support and guidance

Prestatyn High School is committed to pupils' personal and social development. Staff care deeply about the well-being of their pupils and are sensitive to their individual circumstances. The school has an extensive range of tailored provision that supports pupils to improve their emotional well-being and mental health in an inclusive, supportive environment where everybody matters. Although, the school promotes attendance well and provides helpful interventions to support those who need it, attendance is still below where it was before the pandemic.

The school has increased beneficially its capacity to support the development of pupils' social and emotional needs. This includes a student liaison officer, the school counselling service, and the 'Summer Holiday Enrichment Programme' (SHEP). Staff work effectively with a broad range of external agencies to provide beneficial additional support for those pupils that need it.

Pupils benefit from a well-considered and comprehensive PSE programme, which caters well for pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development. There are a wide range of well-planned opportunities to explore themes such as mental health and emotional needs, identifying and promoting equality and diversity. The school's provision is carefully monitored and is adapted promptly in response to any local social issues. The needs of the community are central to this provision. Half-termly newsletters celebrate aspects of school life and pupils' achievement and highlight charitable contributions to the local and wider community.

The school values pupil voice and pro-actively encourages their participation in all aspects of school life. There is a wide range of worthwhile groups and committees, including an eco-group and the anti-discrimination group, and the school ensures that all groups of pupils are represented. Pupils in these groups influence the direction of the school whilst developing their leadership skills. For example, the anti-discrimination group worked meaningfully with the school to develop the social responsibility scheme of learning and to establish a prayer room.

Pupils with ALN benefit from suitable provision and the additional learning needs area provides a calm and safe atmosphere. There are appropriate interventions in

place to support pupils with weak literacy and numeracy skills. Staff are deployed effectively to support pupils' learning and needs. Following the appointment of the new ALN Co-ordinator, the school has accelerated its processes for implementing the new ALN Act.

The school has effective provision to support pupils' emotional and behavioural needs, such as a 'Well-being Room' and 'Engagement Centre'. These spaces respond to the varying needs of pupils and provide purposeful support to improve their engagement and well-being. This is a particular strength of the school's work.

There are extensive opportunities for pupils to engage in physical activity to develop their mental and physical health. In addition, there is a diverse menu of daily extra-curricular clubs that expand pupils' social and cultural experiences. Pupils' understanding of Welsh culture, identity and heritage is fostered through school Eisteddfod celebrations, Santes Dwynwen's Day and Urdd 'Cogurdd' competitions.

The school provides a beneficial range of option evenings and external visits to help pupils to make informed choices about their future. Pastoral leaders effectively analyse pupils' preferred future learning choices and provide tailored support through one-to-one meetings. Sixth form pupils access worthwhile support through university visits, mock interviews and financial support programmes.

The school has a strong culture for safeguarding and promoting pupils' well-being. They respond promptly to child protection concerns and make the necessary referrals. Staff work well with outside agencies to provide helpful support for pupils and their families. All staff receive regular beneficial training. They have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities in keeping pupils safe and they work diligently to help pupils develop an understanding of how to keep themselves safe. As a result, most pupils feel safe in school and say that they are free from bullying.

The school has effective processes to investigate well-being concerns reported by pupils and provides beneficial support to those involved. The 'Engagement Centre Prestatyn' (ECP) is a worthwhile resource to support the school in improving pupils' behaviour. It has a positive working environment and supports pupils well to reintegrate back into mainstream lessons when they are ready.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides strong, decisive leadership and is supported ably by his senior team. Since his appointment, he has worked with determination to establish and communicate effectively a clear vision, which ensures that all staff take positive responsibility for improving the life chances of their pupils.

Senior leaders have developed successfully a committed team of staff who work well together. This has had a positive impact on improving pupils' well-being, engagement and, in particular, the pride that they take in their work. Leaders at all levels base their decision-making on a detailed understanding of the needs of the locality and work hard to ensure that the school is at the heart of their community.

Leaders are strong role models for their staff, pupils and the wider school community. High expectations along with a tightly managed agenda for change and a suitable

range of professional learning have supported the school to create a positive learning environment and to secure consistently high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour.

Senior leaders' roles and responsibilities are distributed equitably and make the best use of individuals' skills. This provides a helpful balance between supporting pupils' academic progress and their well-being, including developing their mental and physical health.

Over time, the school has established well-understood processes for self-evaluation and improvement planning. Senior leaders carry out a comprehensive range of broadly relevant activities to identify strengths and areas for development across all aspects of the school's work. These include helpful opportunities to gather pupils' views along with those of parents and other stakeholders. The school routinely draws these findings together into informative summaries.

Despite these helpful approaches, senior leaders' focus is weighted too heavily on staff's compliance with school policies. They place too great an emphasis on end of key stage outcomes and other data, rather than evaluating the progress that pupils make in lessons and over time. Senior leaders carry out regular lesson observations and book reviews but, in the main, check whether teachers include the school's preferred methods or routines rather than evaluating the quality of provision. They do not distinguish well enough between the most important aspects of learning and teaching or on the progressive development of pupils' skills. Overall, leaders do not identify strengths or areas for improvement with sufficient precision or accuracy and do not evaluate provision in light of its impact on learning. As a result, the school's view of its work is overly positive, particularly with respect to learning and teaching and the impact of professional learning.

The school shares its whole-school priorities well. The five overarching priorities are derived, in the main, from senior leaders' strong moral purpose and zest for improvement. The priorities are exemplified well by explanations of why they are important, and broadly what success will look like. In addition, the school has a comprehensive operational improvement plan, which has detailed actions for every aspect of the school's work and reflects national priorities. In recent years, leaders have demonstrated improvement in a few important areas of the school's work, including building strong and trusting relationships across the whole school community and sustained improvements in behaviour. Although senior leaders monitor against completion of actions in their improvement plans, they do not evaluate accurately the impact that their actions have, particularly with respect to pupils' progress in knowledge, understanding and skills and aspects of teaching.

Many middle leaders have a suitable understanding of the general strengths and improvement priorities in their areas of responsibility and make suitable use of the progress data provided by senior leaders. This gives them a detailed understanding of pupil outcomes, including those at risk of underachieving. However, curriculum leaders have a more limited role in evaluation and improvement processes, and this limits their ability to have a clear understanding of the specific strengths and areas for improvement within their departments, including the quality of teaching and pupil progress.

Line management processes are clear and supportive and provide helpful opportunities for leaders to challenge staff at all levels. However, these processes do not always focus precisely enough on planning for strategic improvement in the quality of teaching and learning.

The school has a broad professional learning programme that has supported all staff to understand the school's expectations for all areas of its work. It has begun to support beneficially the development of a few aspects of teaching such as questioning and feedback. Leaders provide helpful opportunities for staff at all levels to share effective practice and this is beginning to create a reflective culture across the school.

The governing body are highly supportive of the school and provide relevant challenge to all leaders about aspects such as the spending of the pupil development grant and outcomes from external examinations. They are proud members of the school community and dispense their duties diligently, making a positive contribution to the strategic direction of the school including ensuring that the school has suitable arrangements for healthy eating and drinking.

Senior leaders and governors manage the school's finances well. They review spending and plan responsibly, taking appropriate actions where necessary. This has helped them to successfully reduce their deficit budget whilst maintaining a broad curriculum offer.

The school makes carefully planned and targeted use of the pupil development grant to support the well-being, achievement and experiences of pupils eligible for free school meals and those from low-income households. Examples of innovative strategies include supporting intergenerational digital projects linked to a nearby care home and setting up a 'Youth Shedz' space with the youth service and the local community that offers bespoke support and training for vulnerable learners.

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 publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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This document has been translated by Trosol (English to Welsh).