



Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**King Henry VIII Comprehensive School
Old Hereford Road
Abergavenny
Monmouthshire
NP7 6EP**

Date of inspection: May 2011

by

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



During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the school's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

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Context

King Henry VIII Comprehensive School is an 11-18 mixed community school serving the small town of Abergavenny and its surrounding rural area in Monmouthshire. Part of the school's catchment area includes a Communities First area.

There are currently 1,073 pupils on roll, including 175 students in the sixth form. Pupils are from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds with 13.7% eligible for free school meals. This is below the Wales average for secondary schools of 17.1%.

Pupils entering the school represent the full range of ability. The area is mainly English speaking with very few pupils speaking Welsh as their first language. There are a few pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds. Four percent of pupils have statements of special educational need, compared with 2.7% for Wales as a whole. A total of 14% of pupils are on the school's special educational needs register. This is below the national average of 19.6% for secondary schools.

The current headteacher was appointed in 2009 and the senior management team is a mix of recently appointed and well-established staff.

The 2010-2011 individual school budget per pupil for King Henry VIII Comprehensive School is £4,259, which compares with a maximum of £4,259 and a minimum of £3,884 for secondary schools in Monmouthshire. The school has the highest budget per pupil of the four secondary schools in Monmouthshire.

Summary

The school's current performance	Adequate
The school's prospects for improvement	Good

Current performance

There are good features in the school's work. These include:

- the improvement in performance in key indicators in key stage 4;
- the progress pupils make in the majority of lessons in developing their knowledge and understanding;
- the behaviour of pupils and their positive attitudes to learning;
- the broad, balanced and appropriate curriculum which meets the needs of many pupils;
- the inclusive ethos and well co-ordinated provision for support and guidance; and
- the range of effective partnerships.

However, current performance is judged as adequate overall because:

- there is inconsistent performance in public examinations and teacher assessments, often below the average for similar schools;
- the differences between the performances of boys and girls are much wider than Wales and family averages;
- provision for skills across the curriculum is not yet developed enough; and
- the quality of marking varies too much between and within subjects.

Prospects for improvement

The school's prospects for improvement are judged as good because:

- the headteacher and senior leadership team provide a clear sense of direction based on a detailed and accurate assessment of the school's strengths and weaknesses;
- staff at all levels are clear about their roles and responsibilities;
- senior managers identify and challenge underperformance rigorously;
- the school has made significant improvements in standards in key stage 4 over the past two years; and
- the system for self-evaluation is well-planned and robust.

Recommendations

The school needs to:

- R1 further improve performance in key indicators in key stage 3 and 4;
- R2 improve the performance of boys;
- R3 develop skills progression across the curriculum, in particular to improve pupils' reading and writing;
- R4 ensure that learning activities meet the needs of all learners and that all teaching matches the high expectations of the best practice in the school; and
- R5 make sure that marking is more consistent in quality and helps pupils to improve and make progress.

What happens next?

The school will produce an action plan that shows how it will address the recommendations. Progress in addressing the recommendations will be monitored by Estyn.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Adequate

Standards: Adequate

In key stage 3, the core subject indicator (the expected performance in English or Welsh, mathematics and science, the core subjects of the National Curriculum) is just above the Wales average, although the school's performance has declined over the last three years. When compared with performance in similar schools, in 2010, the core subject indicator was close to the average for the family of schools and in the third quarter compared with the benchmarks for schools with a similar percentage of free school meals. Performance in mathematics, English and science has fluctuated from year to year. In 2010, at level 5, mathematics performance was in the top half of that for similar schools, while science was in the bottom half and English in the bottom quarter. At level 6 and above, performance in mathematics and science was above the family average, while that of English was similar to it. Pupils' progress from the previous key stage is adequate. In key stage 3 assessments, standards of oracy, reading and writing have declined. They are below family and national averages.

In key stage 4, performance in 2010 was broadly in line with family averages and above Wales averages. The school was in the top half of its free-school-meals benchmark group in the level 2 threshold (equivalent to five GCSEs at grade A* to C) including English or Welsh and mathematics. This performance, as well as that in the core subject indicator and the level 1 threshold (equivalent to five GCSEs at grade D to G), has improved over the last three years. However, performance in the level 2 threshold remains below family averages. Compared with that in similar schools, the core subject indicator and level 1 and 2 thresholds are in the bottom half of those of the free-school-meals benchmark group. Despite improvements over the last three years, the wider points score (comprising all externally approved qualifications at age 16) remains below the national and family averages and is in the lowest benchmark quarter. The percentage of learners leaving school without a qualification has improved over the last three years and is now in line with the family average and better than the Wales average. However, compared with their performance in previous key stages, learners in key stage 4 do not make enough progress in most indicators.

In the sixth form, the percentage of pupils achieving the level 3 threshold (equivalent to two A levels at grade A* to E) and wider points score (comprising all externally approved qualifications at age 18) increased in 2010. Performance in the level 3 threshold is now similar to, and the wider points score above, the Wales average.

In both key stage 3 and key stage 4, girls usually attain higher standards than boys. In 2010, the difference in the performance of boys and girls was considerably wider than family and Wales averages in most indicators. In key stage 4, pupils receiving free school meals improved their performance at the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics as well as the level 2 threshold, and the gap between them and other pupils decreased. Pupils with special educational needs and English as an

additional language make the expected progress.

In 2010, 86% of Year 11 pupils went onto full-time further education and training, which is similar to the local authority average and above the average for Wales. About 5% of leavers are not engaged in education, employment or training, which is above the local authority average but in line with the Wales average.

In the majority of lessons, pupils are confident and articulate. They give detailed explanations, showing good knowledge and understanding. They listen carefully to others' opinions and support each other in pair and group work. A few pupils lack confidence in expressing their opinions in front of other pupils.

Many pupils read accurately and fluently. They can identify key features in texts and select evidence to support their viewpoints. Many pupils show clear thinking skills in understanding key concepts and making predictions from a range of sources. They apply previous learning well and make good progress. In a few classes, particularly where learning activities are not adapted well enough to suit pupils' needs, pupils do not make enough progress.

Most pupils write well for a wide variety of purposes and audiences and make good use of subject-specific vocabulary. Many pupils write accurately and at length. The written work of a few pupils, particularly boys, shows weaker presentation skills, more limited responses and errors in spelling and grammar. In general, most pupils are able to use number skills appropriately and can present data in charts and graphs accurately.

Pupils make good progress in Welsh second language. They are able to construct sentences well at an appropriate level and they show increasing accuracy in their pronunciation. In key stage 3, results improved in 2010. Performance is now similar to Wales averages but is in the bottom benchmark quarter. In key stage 4, most pupils are entered for the Welsh second language short course at GCSE and their performance is above the Wales average. However, few pupils follow the full course qualification.

Wellbeing: Good

Pupils enjoy coming to school and nearly all say that they feel safe and well cared for. Behaviour is very good. Over the last three years, the number of temporary exclusions has decreased significantly and there have been no permanent exclusions. Incidents of bullying are rare and pupils say that the school deals with these effectively. Pupils are considerate, courteous to each other, and welcoming to visitors. Attendance has improved over the last three years and compares favourably with that of similar schools. Pupils in Year 7 benefit from the support of trained peer mentors in the sixth form.

Most pupils say that they understand how to make healthy choices when choosing food. Many pupils take part in regular physical exercise and large numbers participate in initiatives such as 5x60 and other sporting activities. Many pupils take part in a wide range of cultural activities within the school and in the local community.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. They arrive punctually and most work hard in lessons. Many pupils understand how well they are doing and know how to improve.

Pupils express their opinions about school life through an effective school council. It is actively involved in making decisions and has been influential in improving the school uniform, promoting healthy eating and opening a coffee shop for use by the sixth form.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Good
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Learning experiences: Good

The school offers a broad, balanced and appropriate range of learning opportunities. The key stage 3 curriculum meets National Curriculum requirements. The 'Key Steps' basic skills initiative supports groups of less able pupils well in Year 8 and Year 9, whereas more able pupils have access to an additional modern foreign language. The number of subjects offered to both 14 to 16-year-old and post-16 pupils exceeds the minimum requirements of the Learning and Skills Measure (Wales). There is a clear progression route to the next stage of learning or into employment. The vocational courses offered are appropriate to meet pupil needs and the school monitors the uptake carefully.

A comprehensive range of extra-curricular activities and community-based projects enhances pupils' learning experiences. These provide access to valuable non-formal qualifications, where available.

Well-developed intervention programmes for literacy and numeracy offer good support for lower ability pupils. Pupils in key stage 3 are able to gain Essential Skills Wales qualifications in three skill areas through personal and social education and successful skills activities days. At present, only a few pupils have achieved these level 1 qualifications. However, opportunities for skills progression in lessons are less well developed.

There is good provision for more able pupils throughout the school. Notably, more able pupils benefit from discrete courses in separate science in key stage 4 and curriculum enhancement in Year 13 through the Open University 'Young Applicants in Schools and colleges Scheme' level 4 courses.

Pupils have good opportunities to develop their understanding of Welsh culture, including participating in the school's annual eisteddfod as well as the town's eisteddfod festival. Recently, pupils in key stage 4 have been able to take full-course Welsh outside the curriculum and the uptake is good. The school has not yet made enough progress in encouraging pupils to use their Welsh language skills outside Welsh lessons.

The eco-committee has made rapid progress in promoting activities and initiatives. These, alongside useful overseas links, are beginning to develop a clear whole-school understanding of sustainable development and global citizenship.

Teaching: Adequate

In most lessons, working relationships between teachers and pupils are good. Many teachers set clear learning objectives and match work carefully to pupils' needs. They have good subject knowledge and plan lessons carefully to provide a sequence of stimulating learning activities. This means that pupils work productively and maintain their levels of interest and motivation throughout lessons. A majority of teachers conduct helpful plenary sessions which have a positive impact on learning.

In a minority of lessons, teachers do not adapt the work enough to meet the needs of the range of learners. In addition, tasks do not engage pupils' interest well enough and expectations are not as high as they should be.

The absence of a common approach to assessment means that the quality of marking varies too much between and within departments. Many teachers mark books regularly and give informative and constructive comments to help pupils improve. However in a minority of books, marking is superficial and does not give pupils enough guidance on how to improve the standard of their work. Many teachers encourage pupils to evaluate their own work and learn effectively from each other. However, not all teachers consistently apply this good practice across the school.

Pupils are well informed about their progress. An effective tracking system helps teachers identify under-achievement quickly and take appropriate action. The mentoring system for key stage 4 pupils enlists the help of local employers. This has a positive effect on their attitudes to learning.

Interim reports provide parents with clear, concise information on their child's progress, effort and behaviour. A thorough end-of-year report provides comprehensive information about progress in individual subjects and useful targets to help pupils improve.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The comprehensive and well-planned personal and social education programme contributes successfully to pupils' health, wellbeing and personal development.

Pupils benefit from the school's extensive range of extra-curricular and sporting activities. Their participation in these events broadens their experience, knowledge and understanding of health and wellbeing issues. The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively.

Pupils receive well-targeted support from a number of support specialists based in the school, including learning coaches and pastoral support assistants.

The school liaises closely with many external agencies, including the 'Young Carers Initiative' and 'Face2Face' youth counselling scheme. These ensure that all pupils benefit from support appropriate to their needs. The school also works successfully with external professionals to deliver specialist topics to pupils through the personal and social education programme.

Younger pupils are supported well by pupils in Years 12 and 13 who have undertaken basic counselling training.

Partnership arrangements with cluster primary schools are strong. This ensures that Year 7 pupils settle easily in their new environment. Pupils receive appropriate advice and guidance when making choices at the end of key stages 3 and 4.

The school has successful strategies for promoting good behaviour. These include a wide range of rewards and sanctions that pupils understand well. Staff and managers communicate effectively to ensure that they deal with unacceptable behaviour promptly. This, together with the high level of support given to pupils, has resulted in improved attendance and behaviour, and had a positive impact on exclusion figures.

The school has an appropriate policy and procedures for safeguarding.

The school has effective systems for identifying and supporting pupils with additional learning needs. Pupils' attainments are tracked carefully and withdrawal lessons provide good support for specific literacy needs. Pupils who have a difficulty or disability which could affect their learning or full involvement in school life are very well supported, both personally and academically.

Learning environment: Good

The school is a fully inclusive community where pupils have equality of opportunity in their choice of subjects, with any gender stereotyping effectively challenged. The diverse nature of pupils' backgrounds is celebrated. Where appropriate, pupils receive specific support to enable them to achieve their potential. Excellent arrangements are in place to ensure those with physical disabilities are not put at any disadvantage.

Overall, the school provides a very good learning environment. The buildings and grounds are in good condition and well maintained. However, a few classrooms are small for the numbers of pupils in them. The school library, sixth form resource centre, video-conferencing room and indoor and outdoor sporting facilities are particularly good features. The quality and quantity of the learning resources meet the needs of learners and the curriculum, although much of the information and communication technology equipment is outdated. However, the school has secured funding to make necessary investment in upgrading the information and communication technology resources.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Good
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Leadership: Good

Despite standards being adequate, leadership is good because the headteacher and senior leadership team provide the school with a clear and well-communicated sense of direction based on a detailed and accurate assessment of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Over the last two years, the headteacher, supported by the senior leadership team, has introduced more rigour and consistency into the management

and organisation of the school. This has contributed to the recent improvements in standards.

There have been a number of significant improvements to the school's ethos and culture. The headteacher has successfully based the further development of the school on openness and transparency, and the process has gained the support of all stakeholders. Underperformance has been identified and challenged, and a systematic and targeted approach has led to improvements in performance in weaker areas.

Staff at all levels are clear about their roles and responsibilities, and they generally carry them out effectively. Senior managers, through the well-organised line-management arrangements, are well informed about the work of departments and year groups, and provide good support and challenge. Middle managers are becoming increasingly accountable for their areas of responsibility. Many of them lead their teams well. However, a few are not fully effective and do not have enough impact on quality and standards.

Governors are well informed about the performance of the school, and have a secure understanding of where performance is good and where it needs to improve. They use this information to challenge the school to do better. The governors play a suitable role in setting the school's strategic direction.

The school takes appropriate account of local and national priorities, including Learning Pathways 14-19, promoting effective transition from key stage 2 and improving skills.

Improving quality: Good

The school has recently introduced a well-planned and coherent system for self-evaluation. The approach gives significant attention to the analysis of performance data and the use of first-hand evidence of teaching and learning. The views of pupils and parents are collected regularly, and appropriately inform the judgements about many aspects of the school. The system results in an honest, self-critical and accurate appraisal of the schools' strengths and weaknesses.

Increasingly, middle managers are taking on more responsibility for monitoring and evaluating work in their areas. Subject leaders produce annually a thorough analysis of examination and assessment outcomes, and a self-evaluation report. The reports vary in quality, with about half providing a suitably critical appraisal. Only a few clearly identify the key and specific matters that need to be addressed.

The detailed corporate plan that resulted from extensive consultation with stakeholders sets out clear and focused actions based on the whole-school self-evaluation findings. Many objectives are suitably concerned with improving the consistency and robustness of approaches to school improvement. However, a minority of the objectives are not precise enough to ensure that progress and the impact of activities can be accurately measured. Team plans devised by middle managers appropriately state how the teams will contribute to the whole-school objectives. A minority of plans provide a specific indication of the outcomes the

activities are meant to achieve.

The school has effectively addressed shortcomings in identified subjects through the well-organised system of reviews that involve external specialists. These reviews are followed up rigorously and have had a significant impact on quality and standards. The school has made generally good progress in addressing the recommendations of the previous inspection, although there are still some shortcomings in aspects of assessment and in the consistent development of skills.

The 'School Improvement Group' and the timetabled 'Developing Assessment and Pedagogy Strategies' sessions have helped to introduce a number of improvements in approaches to teaching and learning. The school has also made suitable progress in establishing working groups both within the school and with other schools to improve further the quality of teaching and learning. Most of these are at an early stage of development.

Partnership working: Good

The school works well with a wide range of partners. There are well-established links and effective joint strategies and working practices with partner primary schools. A robust and detailed cluster transition plan identifies agreed aims, procedures and joint curriculum projects in physical education, modern foreign languages, science, skills and an 'Olympics' project. The school 'Cluster Council' meetings provide a good opportunity to exchange information and develop activities to improve transition arrangements.

Effective partnerships with other secondary schools, the local college and work-based learning providers have enabled the school to increase the range of collaborative courses offered to 16 to 19-year olds. Successful working arrangements between the 14-19 network quality champion and the school's learning coaches provide good quality assurance of collaborative courses.

A multi-agency group contributes well to the support services of pupils. Very effective partnership working with external advisers has had a direct impact on raising standards through rigorous reviews of departments.

The school has well-established links with parents and a wide range of organisations in the local community that are used well to support pupils. Close collaboration with the local Rotary Club and employers has improved pupils' interview skills and their employment prospects.

Resource management: Adequate

An appropriate recovery plan is effectively addressing a deficit budget.

The school has made significant changes to ensure that resources are managed well and there are good levels of efficiency and cost-effectiveness. The headteacher and bursar control and manage the budget effectively, and spending is planned and monitored carefully. A successfully introduced system provides departments with funding based on a fair formula. Any bids for additional funding must be made

through agreed team plans. This ensures that they correspond to the objectives of the corporate plan.

There are enough suitably qualified teaching staff and they are deployed effectively. The management of the school site and buildings is good.

As standards in the school are judged to be adequate, the school provides adequate value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to learner questionnaires

Estyn received responses from 274 pupils, selected at random from across the age range.

Nearly all pupils feel safe and believe that they are doing well in school. Many pupils think that the school deals well with any bullying and that they have someone to talk to if they are worried. Many pupils say that there are regular opportunities for physical exercise. A majority of pupils are of the opinion that the school teaches them to be healthy. However, around half of sixth form students do not agree. Most pupils report that teachers help them to learn and make progress, and encourage them to do things for themselves and to take on responsibility. Many pupils say that they have enough books and equipment. However, a minority do not think that homework helps them to understand and improve their work.

Most pupils state that the school helps them to understand and respect people from other backgrounds. Many pupils agree that staff respect them and their background and treat all pupils fairly and with respect. Just over half comment that pupils behave well and they can get their work done, although half of key stage 3 pupils disagree. Also, around half of pupils do not believe that the school listens to their views and makes the changes they suggest. Many pupils say that the school prepares them well for the next stage in their education or work and that they were given good advice when choosing their courses. However, a minority of sixth form students do not feel that they were given good advice for choosing courses in the sixth form.

Responses to parent questionnaires

Estyn received 23 completed questionnaires from parents or carers, representing a small proportion of the total number of parents. Of those that responded, many parents expressed positive views about the school.

Most parents are satisfied with the school. They state that the school is well run and that their child likes school. Nearly all comment that pupils were helped to settle in when they started school and are making good progress. Most parents say that teaching is good and that staff treat all pupils fairly and with respect. All parents agree that staff expect pupils to work hard and do their best. However, a minority of parents feel that the homework that is given does not build on what their child learns at school.

Nearly all parents believe that pupils are safe at school and are encouraged to be healthy and take regular exercise. Most say that there is a good range of activities. Many parents are of the opinion that the school encourages pupils to take on responsibility and prepares them well for the next stage of their education or work. However, a minority do not feel that they are kept well informed about their child's progress. Many parents think that their child receives appropriate additional

information in relation to any particular individual needs. Nearly all feel that the school is responsive to questions, problems or suggestions, although a minority do not understand the school's procedures for dealing with complaints.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Jackie Gapper HMI	Reporting Inspector
Stephen Davies HMI	Team Inspector
Christine Hooper HMI	Team Inspector
Ceri Jones HMI	Team Inspector
Nigel Vaughan HMI	Team Inspector
Edward Tipper	Lay Inspector
David Lewis	Peer Inspector
Neil Shutt	School Nominee

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Year groups and key stages

Schools use a common system of numbering year groups from the start of compulsory schooling to 18 years of age. This system emphasises the importance of continuity and eases communication among schools, governing bodies, parents and LEAs.

The term 'Reception' (R) refers to the year group of pupils in a primary school who reach the age of five during the academic year. Year 1 refers to the year group of pupils who reach the age of six during the academic year and so on. Year 13 is the year group of students who reach the age of 18 during the academic year.

Primary phase:

Year	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Ages	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11

Secondary phase:

Year	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13
Ages	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18

The four key stages cover the following year groups:

Key stage 1	Year 1 and Year 2
Key stage 2	Year 3 to Year 6
Key stage 3	Year 7 to Year 9
Key stage 4	Year 10 and Year 11