



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

**A report on**

**Cwmtawe Community School  
Ffordd Parc Ynysderw  
Pontardawe  
Swansea  
SA8 4EG**

**Date of inspection: October 2018**

**by**

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

## About Cwmtawe Community School

Cwmtawe Community School is an 11-16 school in Neath Port Talbot local authority. There are 1,232 pupils on roll which is slightly less than at the time of the last inspection in October 2012. Most pupils come from Pontardawe and the surrounding area, with about 50% opting to attend the school from outside the normal catchment area. The school has two specialist teaching units on site, one for dyslexic learners and the other specialising in autistic spectrum disorder.

The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is 17.4%, which is slightly above the average of 16.4% for secondary schools. The school has 40% of pupils on the special educational needs register, which is much higher than the national average of 22.9% for secondary schools. Around 4% of pupils have a statement of special educational needs, which is higher than the national average of 2.2%.

About 5% of pupils come from minority ethnic groups and a very few pupils come from homes where English is not the first language. Around 14% of pupils are fluent in Welsh because they are either from homes where the predominant language spoken is Welsh or have attended a Welsh-medium primary school.

The headteacher was appointed in 2014. The senior leadership team also includes two deputy headteachers, two assistant headteachers and a business manager.

The school is currently a pioneer school and is working with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward developments relating to professional learning.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website at the link below.  
<http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/Schools/SchoolSearch?lang=en>

## Summary

High aspirations for all pupils are at the heart of the work of Cwmtawe Community School. Most pupils display a positive work ethic and are committed to achieving their potential. They make strong progress in their knowledge, communication and skills and achieve high academic standards. The performance of all pupils consistently compares favourably with that of pupils in similar schools. Many pupils communicate a clear sense responsibility for others, particularly those in their local community. The significant amount of time given by pupils to help others and the substantial sums of money they raise for local good causes are particularly notable features.

Leaders at all levels have created a culture of high expectations for all aspects of the school's work. They have a strong track record of securing improvements and sustaining strong performance.

There is a vibrant culture of learning amongst staff and pupils. High quality teaching and a flexible, innovative curriculum are particular strengths, and are successful in enthusing pupils about their studies. The carefully tailored programme of professional learning activities supports all staff at each stage in their career, extremely effectively.

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

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Strengthen the school's policies and procedures for dealing with any incidents of bullying
- R2 Improve the provision to develop pupils' information communication technology 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 a case study on its work in relation to professional learning and the curriculum, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

## Main findings

### Standards: Excellent

Over time, the school has sustained very strong performance in external examinations and maintained high standards in terms of the quality of pupils' work. Most pupils show a strong commitment to their academic studies and make strong progress in their knowledge, understanding and skills across a range of subjects. In a minority of subject areas, pupils make exceptional progress.

In most lessons, pupils make strong progress. They have secure recall of previous learning and an assured understanding of key concepts in the subjects they study. These pupils apply their skills and knowledge ably to new contexts.

Most pupils make strong progress in their literacy skills. They listen attentively, and with respect, to teachers and peers and follow instructions promptly. Many speak confidently and clearly and are eager to contribute to class discussions. They discuss their ideas with enthusiasm and explain their viewpoints clearly. Many use subject-specific vocabulary and technical terms accurately and confidently. For example, pupils discuss maturely and with sensitivity issues such as discrimination and racism when studying Martin Luther King's influence on the civil rights movement in America.

Most pupils apply their extended writing skills particularly well and make effective use of the writing strategies they have been taught. In English, they employ the conventions of persuasive writing skilfully to prepare speeches on heroism. They write coherently and organise their work logically. Most have a broad vocabulary and many use this to communicate their ideas deftly. They write well for a variety of purposes across a range of subjects. Many pupils write creatively with skill and imagination. They vary sentence types and employ stylistic techniques to add colour to their story writing or their descriptions of their own superheroes. A minority of pupils write with flair and have an assured command of language and writing techniques. A few pupils make frequent basic errors when writing and a few pupils' handwriting, mainly that of boys, is difficult to understand.

During their time at the school, most pupils make very strong progress in their reading skills. They apply confidently a range of reading strategies, such as skimming a text to identify the key points, to help them understand and evaluate reading material. Most read competently for meaning and have a secure understanding of the wide variety of fiction and non-fiction texts that they read. Most locate and extract information efficiently and a majority synthesise and analyse material skilfully. In history, pupils judge suitably the impartiality of a range of sources about Nelson Mandela and apartheid and synthesise the information to draw their own conclusions. Many pupils infer and deduce meaning with skill and sensitivity. Many read aloud clearly with fluency and intonation.

Most pupils have strong numeracy skills. They have a secure grasp of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division and apply these rules confidently in different contexts. Many apply their numerical understanding and skills in subjects other than mathematics particularly well. In geography, for instance, they use their number,

measurement and data handling skills competently to record, display and analyse data about the population of UK cities and climate. In a few subjects, pupils apply their higher order numeracy skills confidently, such as when Year 9 pupils use standard form accurately in science. Many set appropriate scales for graphs and plot them correctly, for example when plotting the volume of limpet shells against their position along the intertidal zone.

Most pupils are competent in their use of information and communication technology (ICT) programmes for basic word processing, presenting information and research. However, their use of more advanced ICT applications, such as modelling, across the curriculum is limited.

Many pupils develop their thinking skills well. They are able to articulate maturely a range of opinions topics, such as whether or not having tattoos impacts on people's ability to progress in their careers. Many pupils make connections between subjects quickly and then apply this knowledge to help them understand their current work. In music, for example, pupils compare musical devices with grammatical devices to describe how they use them to influence the structure of their compositions.

Pupils' creative skills across a range of subjects are a particular strength. In art, they produce engaging work using a wide variety of styles and mediums. They study and emulate styles ranging from aboriginal art to pop art and older pupils explore a variety of mediums including photography, graphics and fine art. In modern foreign languages pupils employ their creative skills to enhance their understanding of the countries whose languages they study. For example, in German they produce traditional cones known as 'schultute' given to German schoolchildren on their first day at school and make gingerbread houses.

Over the past four years, the school's performance in nearly all of the main indicators at key stage 4 has been consistently above that of similar schools. Provisional data shows that, in 2018, performance at key stage 4 is the best in the school's history and notably above that of similar schools. Performance in most subjects is exceptionally strong. The capped points score has been consistently strong over time and well above expectations. Performance in the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics has been strong over the past four years and compares favourably with performance in similar schools. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades A\*-A improved substantially in 2018 and has been in line with that in similar schools over time.

Over the past four years, the performance of boys, girls and pupils eligible for free school meals compares favourably with that of the same groups of pupils in similar schools. The performance of boys is particularly strong. Pupils with additional learning needs also make strong progress.

At the end of Year 11, nearly all pupils remain in education, employment or training.

At key stage 4, many pupils achieve a level 2 GCSE qualification in Welsh second language.

**Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good**

Most pupils display positive attitudes to their learning. They are well prepared and settle quickly in lessons, ready to work. Many respond enthusiastically to the teaching and are eager to ask and answer questions. They have a positive work ethic, are highly motivated and sustain their concentration well during tasks. Many work productively in pairs and groups and support each other effectively. They develop well as resilient and resourceful, independent learners.

Most pupils arrive to lessons on time and behave well during lessons and around the school. They are polite and courteous to one another and adults, and develop strong working relationships with staff. However, a few younger pupils do not behave well enough.

Most pupils feel safe in school and know who they can turn to if they require help. However, a few feel that the school does not deal well enough with incidents of bullying.

The majority of pupils are aware of the importance of healthy eating and have a positive attitude to healthy lifestyles. There is, for example, extensive participation in the many extra-curricular sporting clubs that the school offers, which helps pupils to stay fit and healthy.

Most pupils develop their social and emotional skills effectively through the curriculum and many participate in a wide range of beneficial activities and clubs. Most pupils gain a mature understanding and respect for people from other backgrounds, faiths and traditions, particularly from religious education lessons and personal and social education activities. They also have a strong sense of responsibility and citizenship. For example, they help organise events and have raised substantial sums of money for a wide range of local and national charities over the past year, including through the school's annual fun run. Overall, pupils have a strong sense of community and are eager to help and support others.

The school council has had a positive impact on many different areas of school life. For example, it has been influential in reviewing the school's summer uniform policy and changing the timings of the school day. It has also been instrumental in introducing more litter bins, picnic benches and organising pupil litter duties. Pupils on the school council organise meetings efficiently and develop valuable skills by taking up roles such as chairperson and secretary. The school council communicates clearly with all pupils through the skilful use of the year councils and elected form representatives.

Many pupils play an active role in the life of the school by undertaking successfully leadership roles such as mental health ambassadors, peer mentors, 'Athletic Young Leaders', and by running the school's nutrition group. Pupils engage enthusiastically in these roles and take their responsibilities seriously. For instance, the valuable peer mentoring scheme involves Year 10 pupils supporting Year 7 pupils and continues into Year 8, if needed. These roles provide pupils with important life skills and they gain a great deal of confidence while making a positive contribution to the life of the school.

**Teaching and learning experiences: Excellent**

Highly effective teaching enables pupils to make strong progress in most lessons. It is a notable feature of the school's provision.

Most teachers have strong rapport with their pupils. They encourage and support them consistently, while providing high levels of challenge. These teachers are passionate about their subject and their enthusiasm engages pupils successfully. They plan carefully and have clear aims and objectives for their lessons. They provide a sequence of valuable activities that builds well on previous learning and prepare high quality resources that support pupils' learning suitably. In these lessons, teachers provide clear instructions and many give skilful explanations of complex concepts. Many teachers use their findings from careful monitoring of pupil progress to adapt the lesson skilfully to consolidate learning or correct misconceptions. These teachers provide an environment in which pupils feel safe to make mistakes and learn from them. In a few lessons, there is insufficient challenge.

In a minority of lessons, pupils make exceptional progress. Teachers have extremely high expectations of them and foster a sense of excitement and curiosity in learning. They plan creative activities that capture pupils' imaginations and deepen their learning successfully. This enables pupils to develop as confident independent learners by exploring, investigating and experimenting.

Most teachers question pupils effectively to determine their knowledge and understanding. In the best examples, teachers do not answer pupils' questions directly but provide additional questions that promote pupils' thinking skills particularly skilfully. Many teachers provide helpful verbal feedback in lessons and monitor pupil progress well. They highlight positive aspects of pupils' work and give them insightful advice on how to improve. In a few lessons, teachers do not probe or check pupils' progress and understanding thoroughly enough.

The school plans and adapts its curriculum carefully to ensure it meets the needs of all pupils. This has a positive impact on pupils' progress and is a real strength of the school. Individual departments are flexible and offer pupils a high degree of choice. For example, the art and technology departments offer pupils the opportunity of studying different pathways, such as fine art and construction, in Year 11. This flexibility helps maintain pupils' curiosity and motivation, and widens their subject knowledge.

The school has worked closely with their partner primary schools so that the curriculum in Year 7 builds successfully on the skills pupils gain in key stage 2. Pupils from these schools take part in exciting transition activities such as 'Pop Star', where they are challenged to promote an imaginary band. As well as helping pupils settle into the school, these stimulating activities help develop suitably their ICT, numeracy, communication and creative skills.

The school plans very well for the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across subjects. Literacy and numeracy coordinators have supported staff strongly to ensure there is a common approach to teaching these skills. Most subjects plan a wide array of stimulating and worthwhile opportunities for developing pupils' literacy



skills. The science, geography, and design and technology departments provide demanding tasks for pupils to practise and develop their numeracy skills. These include using standard form, plotting sophisticated graphs and calculating proportions. Most departments offer pupils relevant opportunities to practise basic ICT skills such as word-processing and making slide presentations. However, plans to develop pupils' more sophisticated ICT skills across the curriculum are at an early stage. The school identifies systematically pupils with weaker skills and provides them with a range of targeted interventions that have a positive impact on the development of their literacy and numeracy skills.

Each subject area has a co-ordinator to help develop suitable activities to challenge more able and talented pupils to achieve their best. The school provides these pupils with additional after-school learning activities and a range of educational visits that enrich and develop their learning further. For example, they visit a local hospital to learn about medical health professions and attend a workshop on cyber-security by staff from GCHQ.

The school offers pupils a very wide variety of beneficial sporting and cultural experiences. Most pupils take part in additional opportunities such as the 'Rosslyn Park 7s tournament', and there are annual netball tours to Spain and ski trips. The school provides pupils with valuable, free-of-charge opportunities to learn how to play musical instruments. These additional experiences enhance pupils' cultural life and wellbeing, and support their academic performance well.

The school offers pupils educated in English-medium primary schools an appropriate pathway to build on their grasp of the Welsh language as they move through the school. Nearly all of these pupils are entered for an appropriate Welsh qualification. Since September 2017, the school has developed its provision for pupils educated in Welsh-medium primary schools suitably. As a result, these pupils in Year 7 and Year 8, follow an appropriate curriculum. However, these pupils in Year 9 and those in key stage 4 are not provided with an appropriate level of challenge in terms of their Welsh language development.

The school offers pupils a suitable range of opportunities to learn about Welsh culture and heritage. For example, pupils visit the Urdd camps in Llangrannog and Cardiff and take part in annual school Eisteddfod competitions.

### **Care, support and guidance: Good**

Pupils' development as respectful, well-rounded learners is at the heart of Cwmtawe Community School. The school is a caring and inclusive community, which promotes a culture of high expectations and care for others. The school's mission statement of 'We can and we will succeed by working together and giving of our best' has a positive effect on pupils' behaviour, wellbeing and academic progress.

Community involvement is a significant strength of the school. The school provides an extensive range of opportunities to help pupils contribute to the school and wider community. For example, for a number of years the school has maintained strong links with local organisations for the elderly. Year 9 pupils organise an annual

Christmas lunch for senior citizens from the area which is supported by local businesses who provide food and raffle prizes. A notable strength of the school's work is the emphasis that it places on pupils' awareness of those less fortunate than themselves. For example, pupils in each year group choose a charity to support. These include Welsh Air Ambulance, Dementia, MS Society, local hospitals as well as local charities close to pupils' hearts. These activities make a valuable contribution to pupils becoming ethical and active citizens.

The school provides a valuable variety of opportunities for pupils to fulfil leadership roles and contribute to school life. In addition to groups such as the school council and peer mentoring roles, there are beneficial departmental leadership roles for pupils. For example, language ambassadors organise activities for the 'European day of languages' and help pupils develop their language skills, including Russian.

The school tracks pupils' performance particularly well. It has a comprehensive tracking system that provides a full picture of each pupil's development. Staff use this information skilfully to celebrate pupils' achievements and to ensure that pupils at risk of underachieving are identified quickly and allocated suitable support.

The school's provision for pupils with additional learning needs is strong. Staff work together effectively to ensure that these pupils' needs are identified and met, and that each pupil has every opportunity to succeed. The school's highly effective learning support centre provides a stimulating environment for pupils who have dyslexia and for those who have autism. These pupils are integrated fully into the life of the school and follow as full a curriculum as possible, including valuable sporting opportunities such as gymnastics and swimming. As a result of sensitive, tailored provision, pupils in the centre make very good progress in their physical, academic and interpersonal skills.

The school has valuable partnerships with an extensive range of outside agencies to ensure that pupils have access to specialist advice and support where required. These include useful links with the community police officer, substance misuse services and support groups for young carers.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding generally meet requirements. The school takes suitable measures to raise awareness of how to prevent bullying through the personal and social education programme and assemblies. However, the school's anti-bullying procedures do not give all pupils enough confidence to report incidents, or reassure them that incidents will be dealt with effectively.

The school's comprehensive and well-planned personal and social education programme develops pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. The programme focuses on a range of suitable topics which help pupils to become responsible citizens. External speakers, such as campaigners aiming to reduce alcohol induced violence, contribute significantly towards pupils' understanding of a wide range of social issues.

The school offers extensive opportunities for pupils to take part in regular physical exercise and has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. There is a wide range of extra-curricular sporting activities including the Duke of

Edinburgh programme. There are many examples where pupils go on to represent their school and country at national and international events.

The school offers pupils a wealth of enrichment activities to encourage them all, regardless of background, to participate in their interests. For example, staff offer activities such as yoga, cake decorating and henna hand painting during an activities week.

The comprehensive care, support and guidance provided by the school prepares pupils very well for the responsibilities of adult life. There is a comprehensive programme of careers advice and guidance and all Year 10 pupils undertake valuable work experience.

### **Leadership and management: Excellent**

The headteacher and senior leadership team work together successfully to communicate a clear vision based on a culture of high expectations for all pupils. As a result, staff have a strong commitment to 'develop young people to live life to the full and become responsible adults who contribute positively to society'. Strong and decisive leadership at all levels has led to sustained, high levels of pupil performance and attendance, pupils' positive attitudes to learning, effective teaching, and a highly effective curriculum.

Senior leaders have developed a strong sense of community amongst the pupils, staff and parents. Staff feel valued and trusted, and morale is high. There is a common purpose amongst staff, with a strong ethos of collaboration and team working based on continuous improvement. Nearly all leaders model and promote effective professional values and behaviours.

Senior leaders have clear job descriptions and their roles and responsibilities are allocated equitably and fairly. These are understood fully by all staff. Middle leaders understand and execute their roles well. They have a secure understanding of the strengths and weaknesses within their areas of responsibility and know how to secure improvement. Lines of accountability are clear and there are regular review meetings to monitor progress against departmental and whole school targets effectively.

Governors are well informed and have an assured understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The well-defined and effective committee structure enables the governors to play an influential role in setting the school's strategic direction. Governors provide senior leaders with valuable support and a high level of challenge.

The school has comprehensive arrangements to evaluate its work and to plan for improvements. Senior and subject leaders gather and analyse first-hand evidence effectively to evaluate pupil outcomes. For example, they analyse performance data thoroughly, and compare pupil standards and progress with similar schools. Senior leaders extend this analysis to make valuable comparisons between subjects within the school, which includes standards of different groups of pupils and those from different starting points.

Leaders make beneficial use of broader evidence, including findings from lesson observations and the scrutiny of pupils' work. The school seeks and acts on the views of pupils and parents through useful platforms such as focus groups and surveys. For example, they recently revised the 'effective feedback policy' in response to pupils' and parents' views.

Self-evaluation arrangements provide staff and governors with a clear picture of the school's strengths and areas for development. Overall, leaders' plans for improvement draw securely on the evidence from these processes and they align well with whole-school priorities.

Staff participate effectively in well-organised performance management processes, which support whole-school priorities and improvement planning well. Leaders at all levels provide strong support to staff to help them improve their practice. Where any underperformance is identified, this is addressed sensitively and firmly.

Throughout the school, there is a vibrant culture of learning, for staff as well as for pupils. Senior leaders promote successfully a clear vision for professional learning. This vision reflects the school's practice of developing the potential of all staff so that they have the greatest impact in the classroom and on pupil outcomes.

All staff benefit from an extensive range of professional learning activities, which include observation groups to explore effective practice and different or innovative approaches to teaching and learning. Staff also benefit from the school's successful partnership with higher education providers, the regional consortium and external organisations. For example, the school has worked successfully to develop and lead a series of teaching and learning, leadership, and coaching programmes for the region. The majority of the school's staff participate enthusiastically in these programmes as delegates, mentors or leaders. These opportunities, and the scope to apply for fixed-term 'shadow' leadership posts within the school, support the development of aspiring leaders extremely well.

The school's high quality provision for professional learning, and the positive impact that it has had on improving professional practice and pupil outcomes, is helpful to its role as a Professional Learning Pioneer School. Through this role, staff share and collaborate with other schools about effective practice to drive improvements as part of a self-improving system.

The headteacher, governors, and the business manager keep a tight control of the school's finances. The school has had a stable budget for the past five years with modest reserves that it uses wisely. Leaders and managers use the available finances appropriately and efficiently to deliver the school's strategic priorities and to create an attractive environment for pupils and staff. The school has an appropriate number of qualified and experienced teachers and support staff to deliver the curriculum and to support pupils of all abilities. Almost all teachers teach their main subject specialism. Budgets are delegated appropriately to departments and their spending is monitored carefully. The school makes effective use of grant funding to support the wellbeing and progress of vulnerable pupils.

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website ([www.estyn.gov.wales](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

<b>Excellent</b>	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
<b>Good</b>	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
<b>Adequate and needs improvement</b>	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
<b>Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement</b>	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths

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

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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Publication date: 03/12/2018