



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

**A report on**

**St Martin's School  
Hillside  
Caerphilly  
CF83 1UW**

**Date of inspection: May 2019**

**by**

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

## About St Martin's School

St Martin's School is an English-medium 11-18 comprehensive school in Caerphilly local authority. There are 979 pupils on roll, including 132 in sixth form. At post-16, the school works with two other schools and further education colleges as part of the Caerphilly Basin Partnership. At the time of the last inspection 2014, there were 1,000 pupils on roll. The school is situated close to Caerphilly town centre and most pupils come from the town.

Around 18.4% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This is higher than the national average of 16.4% for secondary schools in Wales. Around 29% of pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas in Wales. Around 2% of pupils have statements of special educational needs compared with 2.5% for Wales as a whole. Just under 19% of pupils have a special educational need, which is lower than the national average of 22.9%.

Most pupils are from a White British background. Less than 1% of pupils speak English as an additional language. Very few pupils are fluent in Welsh.

The current headteacher was appointed in 2015. In addition a deputy headteacher and two assistant headteachers make up the senior leadership team.

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

St Martin's Comprehensive School has a strong, caring ethos. Many teachers show high levels of dedication to ensure that pupils perform to the best of their ability. They deliver exciting lessons that capture pupils' imagination. As a result, most pupils enjoy coming to school. They are resilient learners and many have a mature attitude to their work.

Outcomes for pupils are consistently strong. During their time in school, many pupils develop their skills and subject knowledge well. In particular, pupils gain strong literacy skills.

The headteacher offers strong leadership. Senior leaders work well as a team and have exceptionally high expectations of staff and pupils.

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

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Increase opportunities to develop pupils' ICT and numeracy skills across the curriculum
- R2 Plan opportunities for pupils to use Welsh in informal situations
- R3 Ensure that all staff receive essential professional learning opportunities
- R4 Ensure there is an adequate number of toilets for pupils
- R5 Eliminate the current budget deficit

## **What happens next**

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

## Main findings

### Standards: Good

During their time at school, many pupils make strong progress in their learning. They develop their subject knowledge and understanding well. In a few cases, pupils make exceptional progress. They develop a deep understanding of key concepts and apply these ideas skilfully in unfamiliar contexts. In a few instances, pupils do not make enough progress.

The manner in which pupils speak and listen to one another is a strength of the school. Many pupils across the ability range, have a wide subject specific and general vocabulary. When given the opportunity, they offer well considered responses to their teachers' questions and respond maturely to their peers in animated classroom discussions. About half of pupils speak eloquently and express their ideas confidently, such as when discussing the symbolism of the death of Curley's wife in the novel 'Of Mice and Men'. Many pupils make suitable progress in their ability to speak in Welsh and a few are capable of forming their own sentences with appropriate syntax and grammar. However, pupils do not use Welsh frequently enough apart from during their Welsh lessons. A minority of pupils make exceptional progress in their understanding of and ability to speak Spanish.

Many pupils make strong progress in their reading skills. They use a range of reading strategies, such as skimming and scanning, successfully to gain a general overview of texts and pick out specific facts. Many read competently for meaning, for example when analysing a text about enzymes in their biology lessons to gain an understanding of their structure and function. Many pupils develop a sound understanding of sophisticated aspects of language and can evaluate the effectiveness of rhetorical devices confidently. A majority of pupils synthesise evidence from a range of texts successfully, for example in history when analysing the style of 'flappers' in the 1920s. Many pupils read aloud confidently, with appropriate expression.

Many pupils communicate their ideas articulately in extended pieces of writing, for example when discussing themes such as the existence of god in their ethics lessons. In general, they organise their work into paragraphs appropriately and make few spelling, punctuation or grammatical errors. A few pupils make frequent spelling and punctuation errors and do not express themselves coherently. In a few cases, pupils demonstrate flair and creativity producing sentences such as 'Autumnal trees were rustling, dispersing leaves in a palette of colours that fluttered into the sky as if they were weightless'.

Many pupils have sound numeracy skills and demonstrate a secure grasp of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. They apply these skills appropriately in a few subjects across the curriculum, for example when calculating empirical formulae in chemistry. However, pupils do not encounter opportunities to use their numeracy skills to solve problems frequently enough. Many pupils understand how to select the appropriate graph to display different types of data. They set appropriate scales for their axes, plot data points accurately and draw lines of best fit to show relationships between variables successfully.

In many subjects, pupils develop their creativity well, such as when writing an imaginative story exploring how they would feel if they were shipwrecked and isolated on an island or seeking solutions to solve social and environmental problems in the slums of Mumbai.

Many pupils develop their physical skills well. For example, they improve their hand-eye coordination when playing baseball in physical education and develop their fine motor skills when working with clay in their art lessons.

Most pupils have a competent understanding of how to use ICT packages for basic word processing, making presentations and searching the internet. However, they do not develop their ICT skills in subjects other than ICT itself.

Since 2015, performance in the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics and the capped points score is notably higher than in similar schools. Over the same period, the proportion of pupils gaining five A\*-A at GCSE is consistently higher than in similar schools.

In the last three years, boys' and girls' performance in most performance indicators, is better than that of boys and girls in similar schools. The performance of pupils eligible for free-school-meals is variable. However, in two out of the last three years, outcomes for this group are close to those in similar schools.

Performance in Welsh second language at level 2 is consistently strong. In general, pupils with additional learning needs perform well against their learning targets.

In the sixth form, the school's performance is mixed. Outcomes at level 3 and the average wider points are consistently below those in similar schools. However, performance at 3A\*-A is close to that in other schools and the proportion of pupils gaining three A\*-C grades is consistently above that in other schools.

### **Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good**

Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. Nearly all arrive punctually to lessons. Most listen attentively, engage readily in learning activities and sustain their concentration well. Through various aspects of the curriculum, most pupils are developing well as informed citizens, for example, when considering the effects of climate change and global warming. Most pupils work well in pairs and in groups. For example, in small groups they consider thoughtfully the implications of being pressurised to smoke, how to withstand peer pressure and how to persuade others to stop smoking. They respond positively to others' opinions such when discussing the causes, successes and failures of the Jarrow and Rhondda hunger marches. Many pupils show high levels of perseverance and try to solve problems for themselves before asking staff for help. Most pupils are courteous and respectful to staff, peers and visitors to the school.

Many pupils feel safe at school and think that the school deals well with the few instances of bullying. They feel that there are plenty of opportunities for them to get regular exercise through the range of valuable sporting activities offered in extra-curricular clubs. Many develop well their understanding of how to keep healthy. As a result of the work of the school council and the school nutrition action group, there is a greater range of healthy options available to pupils in the canteen.

During their time in school, many pupils develop their leadership skills well through taking on various responsibilities, for example younger pupils have recently established an on line publication, 'The red and gold', detailing events in school and older pupils act as 'sports leaders'. There is appropriate pupil involvement in making decisions about issues that impact on their wellbeing through valuable surveys and focus groups. As a result of these, for example, the school council has secured the provision of water fountains. Pupils with expertise in using software develop their interpersonal skills well through helping other pupils and staff to develop their ICT skills.

### **Teaching and learning experiences: Good**

Many teachers develop positive working relationships with pupils and manage their behaviour well. They are highly committed to securing the best outcomes for pupils and the majority deliver their lessons with enthusiasm. Nearly all teachers display strong subject knowledge and provide strong language models for pupils. For example, in Welsh and modern foreign languages, teachers make effective use of the target language to set the correct tone and immerse pupils in the language.

Many teachers plan their lessons well and provide pupils with a rich diet of experiences. They reinforce pupils' prior learning and develop their knowledge, skills and understanding well. These teachers explain challenging ideas clearly and provide effective support for pupils.

In a few cases, teaching has outstanding features. In these instances, teachers have exceptionally high expectations and deliver their lessons with verve. They know their pupils well and plan their lessons carefully to ensure pupils make rapid progress. They manage classroom and group discussions adeptly, and probe pupils' understanding in order to deepen their thinking. These teachers challenge all pupils including those with additional learning needs skilfully, for example by encouraging them to use ambitious vocabulary when completing literacy tasks. As a result, these pupils gain the independence and confidence they require to tackle difficult tasks. They persevere well and make exceptional progress.

In a few lessons, teachers do not provide learning experiences that are challenging enough. The pace of learning is too slow and teachers do not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to think for themselves and discuss their work.

The majority of teachers check regularly on pupils' progress during lessons and offer useful verbal feedback. A minority ask thought-provoking questions that prompt pupils to think deeply. For example, in language lessons, teachers ask pupils to recognise words which are related to words in other languages. This leads to a deeper understanding of the links between languages and widens their vocabulary. The majority of teachers provide useful written feedback advising pupils how they can improve their work. Overall, however, teachers do not ensure that pupils respond productively to their comments.

The school provides a suitably balanced curriculum that meets the needs of pupils of all abilities and builds well on their previous learning. Worthwhile transition activities with cluster primary schools contribute effectively to maintaining continuity in pupils' learning experiences and supporting their wellbeing. The Year 6 'more able' project

provides a few pupils with stimulating opportunities to extend their literacy and numeracy skills in 'masterclasses'. In general, the school's arrangements for grouping pupils are suitable. However, a few very large classes in key stage 3 create difficulties in managing group and practical work.

At key stage 4, the school provides opportunities for pupils to gain a suitable range of general and vocational qualifications. The school offers more able pupils valuable opportunities to study for additional qualifications in mathematics. At key stage 5, pupils have worthwhile opportunities to obtain qualifications in a broad range of A-level subjects.

The school has mapped opportunities to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital competency skills across the curriculum well. Many subject areas plan beneficial opportunities to develop pupils' literacy skills. There are useful opportunities for developing pupils' numeracy skills in a few subjects. For example, the humanities faculty offers an innovative series of numeracy activities in their 'Correlation street' challenge. In this, pupils are given thought-provoking activities such as exploring the link between petrol prices and taxi fares in different areas and the connection between the cost of different drinks and their alcoholic content in the 'Rovers' return' pub.

The school monitors pupils' progress in literacy and numeracy closely and implements a beneficial range of strategies to support the development of pupils with weaker skills. These approaches include interesting and engaging schemes of work as well as effective targeted intervention programmes.

The school has recently developed a range of worthwhile learning resources to enhance the development of pupils' digital competency skills. For example, the science department sets pupils a task to develop a flowchart to ensure they follow laboratory rules. However, the school does not plan for the progressive development of pupils' ICT skills across the curriculum well enough.

The school's strategies to improve pupils' Welsh language skills are having a positive impact on outcomes in key stage 4. However, apart from in their Welsh lessons, there are not enough opportunities for them to practise their Welsh.

The school provides an appropriate range of sporting, cultural and academic experiences to enhance their learning. Examples include educational visits to a chocolate factory to learn about global issues such as exploitation of workers in economically developing countries.

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

The school has a supportive culture that promotes pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development well. Relationships between staff and pupils are positive and many pupils feel staff are caring and approachable.

The school has useful processes to track the academic progress of individuals and groups of learners. Most leaders use information from this system well to identify any potential underperformance and to plan interventions that address the needs of individual pupils successfully.



Interim and annual reports keep parents suitably informed about their child's progress. Annual reports contain useful information regarding pupils' academic progress and attitudes to learning, and include helpful individual targets. However, the format of interim reports is inconsistent and is confusing for parents and pupils. A few are incomplete.

The school has strong procedures for monitoring behaviour and tackling any issues that arise. Leaders regularly seek pupils' opinions and respond to their concerns well. For example, in the light of consultation, the school has updated its reward system beneficially. As a result of concerted effort in this area, incidences of poor behaviour are rare and have reduced over the past few years.

The wellbeing centre is well organised and its staff work closely with a range of external agencies to support vulnerable pupils and their families. Members of the wellbeing team meet regularly to plan tailored support for individual pupils. This support has a positive impact on pupils' wellbeing.

The school has recently introduced robust systems to monitor and improve attendance. Staff use a range of beneficial strategies to promote the value of coming to school regularly including regular communication with parents and the use of the minibus to collect pupils with poor attendance.

Positive relationships with partner primary schools and transition arrangements help pupils to settle quickly at the school. The school uses information provided from these schools and external agencies strategically to support pupils' wellbeing and learning. Staff offer pupils beneficial advice and information when making decisions about the next stage in their education, training or employment.

The school provides valuable support for pupils with additional learning needs. Staff identify individual pupils' learning needs promptly on arrival at the school and plan high quality interventions. This helps them to access the curriculum as well as developing their social and life skills beneficially.

There is a wide range of initiatives that allows pupils to build strong relationships with the local community. This includes activities such as the community gardening project where pupils help maintain the local parks. There is a suitable programme of personal and social education, which develops pupils' understanding of how to maintain their health and wellbeing. There is suitable provision to support pupils' healthy eating and drinking.

The school offers pupils a suitable range of extracurricular activities. For example, the school musical production, sports' clubs including successful rugby teams, girls' soccer teams, netball and water polo. There is a range of valuable educational visits and sports tours including trips to Holland and Canada.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and are not a cause for concern.

### **Leadership and management: Good**

Since his arrival in the school four years ago his enthusiastic and decisive leadership has led the school successfully through a considerable period of change. This

includes addressing sensitively a range of staffing issues and improving the school's reputation in the local community. Senior leaders have established a clear vision for the school with appropriate strategic aims that meet the needs of pupils and the local community. These are reflected by the school's motto of 'dysgu ynghyd, cyflawni ynghyd - learning together, achieving together'.

Senior leaders work well together to deliver the school's strategic aims. They set high expectations for staff and pupils and model and promote professional values and behaviours in their everyday work. They have secured very strong pupil outcomes, effective teaching and improved pupil behaviour. Senior leaders have clear job descriptions. Their roles and responsibilities are shared equitably and are well understood by staff. Lines of accountability are clear and effective.

Many middle leaders understand their roles and responsibilities well. However, a few faculty leaders' do not have a secure enough understanding of how to improve the quality of teaching in their area of responsibility. The heads of learning work together well as a team and play a valuable role in ensuring high levels of pupil wellbeing and attainment.

Governors have a secure understanding of the schools' strengths and weaknesses. They provide valuable support and an appropriate degree of challenge to the headteacher and the senior team. They have a sound understanding of performance data. As a body, they understand the needs of the community well and make sure that the school reflects their aspirations for the pupils.

The school has recently revised its arrangements to evaluate its work and plan for improvement. Leaders make beneficial use of a broad range of evidence including findings from lesson observations, learning walks and the scrutiny of pupils' work. Many leaders seek the views of pupils and parents through extensive surveys and act on these purposefully. For example, in response to pupils' feedback that they wanted more opportunities to develop their digital competency, the geography department created a stimulating interactive study to learn about the sustainability of palm oil.

Senior leaders analyse performance data thoroughly and compare pupils' standards and progress with similar schools self-critically. Overall, the school's arrangements for self-evaluation provide staff and governors with a clear picture of strengths and areas for development. Whole-school improvement planning is comprehensive and includes ambitious targets.

In general, middle leaders use evidence gathered from self-evaluation activities well to plan for improvement. However, a few do not make enough use of this evidence. For example, these leaders do not consider shortcomings identified in teaching and learning to plan for improvement.

Senior leaders are developing a strong learning culture across the school, for pupils and staff. All staff benefit from an appropriate range of professional learning activities, including weekly 'Teach meet' sessions to share good practice, and coaching and mentoring triads to explore new approaches to teaching and learning. However, staff do not always receive subject specific update training from examination boards. The school supports the development of staff's leadership skills

well through opportunities to lead on whole school projects as members of the extended leadership team, for example by leading on transition and acting in a senior mentoring role in partnership with a local university. In addition, senior leaders develop and enhance their leadership skills by supporting other local schools, for example on the analysis and tracking of pupil performance.

In general, performance management arrangements are systematic and support whole school priorities well. Senior and middle leaders provide tailored support to help staff improve their practice. Where underperformance is identified, it is addressed sensitively but firmly.

The school has been in a deficit position for a number of years. However, it has an agreed recovery plan with the local authority that aims to deliver a surplus in 2020-2021. The headteacher, business manager and governors manage in year expenditure suitably to ensure that finance is used for the benefit of pupils and staff. In general, the school uses its available finances well to maintain and improve the learning environment in a challenging estate, for example improving the library, bistro, hall flooring and landscaping. The school has improved toilet facilities appropriately but there is an insufficient number of toilets available for both boys and girls.

The school uses its grant funding appropriately to support learners who are at risk of disengaging. This includes the employment of additional learning support assistants and learning coaches. As a result, there has been a significant reduction in fixed and permanent exclusions and instances of poor behaviour. The school has been innovative in securing additional funding to improve the provision and learning experiences for pupils. For example, the school has used additional funding sources to develop the catering kitchen, all weather sports area, bee hives and a poly tunnel to grow vegetables to enhance and provide valuable real life experiences.

## 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: 23/07/2019