



Arolygiaeth Ei Fawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
His 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: November 2022

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

About King Henry VIII Comprehensive School

Name of provider	King Henry VIII Comprehensive School
Local authority	Monmouthshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	1063
Pupils of statutory school age	921
Number in sixth form	141
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 20.3%)	17.5%
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 23.0%)	23.6%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	2.7%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	1.2%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2022
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	02/12/2014
Start date of inspection	14/11/2022

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

During the COVID-19 pandemic the school was successful in supporting pupils and staff including providing strong support for pupils' emotional well-being. There is a wide range of helpful support for vulnerable pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN). Although arrangements to keep learners safe at a time of considerable disruption to the school site, are generally sound, a few health and safety issues were brought to the school's attention during the inspection.

The school has taken a positive approach to the implementation of Curriculum for Wales and has a clear vision which is embraced across all curriculum areas. However, leadership has not succeeded in ensuring consistently good teaching, learning and behaviour. A majority of pupils enjoy their lessons and show respect for their teachers and peers, but in around half of lessons, weaknesses in teaching and inappropriate behaviour contribute to pupils not making sufficient progress. Currently, leaders do not plan for the progressive development of pupils' literacy, numeracy or digital skills strategically enough or the development of pupils' Welsh language skills.

Although the school's self-evaluation processes are relevant, they are not carried out with sufficient rigour or focus. Consequently, the school does not identify precisely the most significant strengths and areas for development in teaching and learning.

Pupils participate enthusiastically in a range of extra-curricular activities. They understand how to lead a healthy lifestyle and the importance of looking after their mental health. Many pupils are confident, articulate and caring individuals.

Most pupils in the sixth form are responsible, enthusiastic, and ambitious learners. They demonstrate a pride in their learning and generally set a good example for younger pupils.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve the effectiveness of teaching and assessment so that pupils are consistently challenged to achieve their potential
- R2 Strengthen self-evaluation processes so that they focus robustly on the impact of teaching on pupils' progress and provide leaders with a precise view of the school's areas for development
- R3 Strengthen provision for and the monitoring of the progressive development of pupils' skills, including Welsh
- R4 Strengthen approaches to promoting positive behaviour, punctuality and attendance
- R5 Address the safeguarding issues identified during the inspection

What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school is in need of significant improvement. The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress about 12 months after the publication of this report.

Main evaluation

Learning

In lessons, a little more than half of pupils make secure progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills. They recall their prior learning well and can apply their understanding in new contexts. In French lessons, for example, pupils apply their understanding of tenses, adjectival agreements and position of pronouns successfully, when writing independently. Pupils' recall and application are also seen in mathematics when they multiply and divide decimal numbers. However, pupils are not always given the opportunity to extend their knowledge or apply it in different or more challenging contexts. Close to half of pupils do not make the progress they should. This is often because of shortcomings in teaching, including the management of behaviour or pupils' poor attitudes to learning. In most cases, pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) make suitable progress against their targets.

The majority of pupils listen well to their teachers and peers. Those who do not listen with sufficient attention and respect, miss information and instructions that would be helpful to their learning. When pupils get the chance and teachers' expectations are clear, the majority use an appropriate vocabulary to provide suitably precise verbal responses. This includes lively involvement in discussions about the possible link between video games and violent behaviour, and whether there are any circumstances in which war may be considered beneficial. A few pupils are very articulate and employ a mature, occasionally sophisticated vocabulary. There are a minority of pupils who are reluctant to contribute to class discussions or to answer the teachers' questions. Often, these pupils lack confidence in their verbal skills or simply choose not to engage well enough with their learning.

Many pupils read for information successfully when, for example looking at historical sources to enhance their understanding of the context of novels like 'Of Mice and Men'. A majority use inference and deduction independently to help their appreciation of poetry such as Wilfred Owen's 'Dulce et Decorum Est' and Owen Sheers' 'Mametz Wood'. Although a minority of pupils find it difficult to move beyond the basic identification of literary techniques and remain unable to discuss their impact, a few make perceptive and interesting comments about writers' use of language such as Old Major's rhetoric in 'Animal Farm'. In history, pupils synthesise information successfully from a range of sources to construct an evidence-based review of the police work in the 'Jack the Ripper' case. Overall, pupils do not use a sufficient range of reading strategies to support their learning in different subjects.

The majority of pupils produce writing that is structured suitably and which, in a few cases, is very engaging. In French, for example, pupils produce extended writing on the theme of television preferences, responding effectively to the teacher's feedback and correcting previous errors. However, around a half of pupils continue to make too many basic errors such as mixing tenses, using subordinate clauses rather than complete sentences, inaccurate spelling and punctuation. Too few pupils take responsibility for improving the technical accuracy and content of their writing before they hand it to the teacher.

Nearly all pupils use their addition, subtraction, and multiplication skills confidently in mathematics and in other areas across the curriculum. Although they apply these well in relevant contexts such as when they calculate and compare utility bills, a few pupils are not secure when they carry out multiple stage calculations especially when they involve division. Furthermore, pupils rely too much on shortcuts, for instance to re-arrange formulae, rather than using their mathematical knowledge and understanding. Most pupils develop, construct and plot graphs appropriately.

Many pupils use basic digital skills appropriately when producing presentations. Pupils make suitable use of basic software functions, including computer aided design (CAD), to draw 3-d shapes to scale. Pupils' use of technology extends into their Skills Challenge work in producing spreadsheets to determine the costs of creating a product. Since the pandemic, many pupils use online learning platforms well to support their individual learning and to collaborate on shared tasks. In certain subjects, pupils use digital tools creatively to design logos and other promotional material for fictional stalls at the Abergavenny food festival. As part of the Skills Challenge Certificate, when researching costs to create and distribute a product, pupils show that they can be divergent thinkers by questioning, posing alternative solutions and challenging assumptions.

Overall, pupils make modest progress in their ability to communicate in Welsh. In a few cases, pupils develop their vocabulary appropriately together with their ability to infer meaning from the context of sentences. While most pupils can offer suitable one word answers to simple questions, the majority find it challenging to construct more extended coherent responses. In general, pupils do not use Welsh in contexts other than in their Welsh lessons frequently enough.

Most pupils in the sixth form are enthusiastic and committed learners. They demonstrate a secure understanding of key concepts and recall of previous learning. They usually apply it successfully to enhance further learning including developing their understanding of how media language is used in radio to communicate meaning and elicit emotions, and to thoughtful considerations of historical sources relating to the American Civil War.

Most pupils make valuable contributions to group discussions and ask pertinent and interesting questions. They work well independently and collaborate effectively.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Many pupils develop positive relationships with their teachers, the well-being team and support staff. They demonstrate respect for their peers and teachers in lessons, and adhere to the school's code of conduct, the '3Rs of Ready, Respectful and Responsible'. Nearly all pupils are confident in articulating their views and opinions about the school and are keen to share examples of their work and their experiences. Most pupils show courtesy and respect to visitors.

The majority of pupils enjoy their lessons and show enthusiasm for their learning. They persevere when challenged and devise suitable solutions to problems. They engage positively and are committed to their learning. However, a minority of pupils do not sustain concentration. This is particularly in lessons where they are required to work independently or where teachers' expectations are too low.

When given the opportunity, many pupils work effectively in pair and group settings. These pupils show appreciation for the contribution of others and respect their opinions. Where verbal and written feedback is given effectively, pupils often respond well. The majority of pupils understand how feedback moves their learning forward.

In a minority of lessons, pupils do not behave appropriately. They lack consideration for their peers and their teacher. A few pupils are late to lessons or find reasons to leave their lessons. This disrupts their learning and that of others. When moving around the school site, a few pupils are overly boisterous. A minority of pupils are reluctant to use the toilets during break and lunchtimes because they do not like the environment and do not always feel safe.

Vulnerable pupils who access the extensive well-being team feel supported. They value highly the targeted intervention they receive, which makes a difference to their self-esteem and mental health. Younger pupils appreciate the sixth form members of the Pupils' Active Listening Service (PALS) who are assigned to each form.

Pupils of all ages have a range of valuable opportunities to develop their leadership skills by becoming Sports' Ambassadors, Well-Being Ambassadors, PALS and school council representatives. They have received worthwhile training to undertake these roles. The PALS attend and run assemblies and assist with daily reflection in form time, as well as literacy and numeracy activities.

Pupils value the opportunity to participate in a wide range of lunchtime and after school clubs, such as boys' and girls' rugby, cross country, chess, dance and LGBTQ+ support groups. Participation rates in these enrichment activities are high. A group of Year 7 pupils, including those with ALN, are proud to be members of an innovative and enterprising technology club, which recycles plastic bottle caps from school to make key rings and coasters for sale in local shops.

The majority of younger pupils feel they have a voice in the school and influence changes, however only a minority of older pupils feel the same way. Pupils have influenced the options for activity in physical education lessons, which include competitive and non-competitive sport. This has increased girls' participation in particular. Members of the school council express themselves maturely and take pride in representing their peers.

Nearly all pupils understand how diet and exercise contribute to a healthy lifestyle. Most have a good understanding of strategies to support their mental health.

Most pupils feel free from bullying. However, where it occurs, pupils do not always feel that alleged incidents of bullying or harassment are dealt with appropriately.

Although attendance has considerably improved since last year a few pupils are persistently absent. The attendance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is notably lower than for other pupils in the school.

Teaching and learning experiences

Most teachers have secure, up-to-date subject knowledge and provide clear instructions that help pupils to understand how to complete tasks. The majority are good language models and promote the accurate use of subject specific terminology.

Support staff collaborate well with teachers and work purposefully with pupils to help them to persevere and to make progress.

In a few lessons, where pupils make strong progress, teachers have high expectations of what pupils can do and plan carefully, to ensure pupils' learning. They use questioning well to probe pupils' understanding, deepen their thinking and to challenge them to develop their verbal responses. These teachers adjust the pace and direction of their lessons skilfully in response to pupils' progress.

In around a half of lessons, teachers have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils can achieve. In these lessons, teachers provide work that challenges pupils appropriately, and they manage pupils' behaviour successfully. In a minority of lessons, strong classroom routines and starter activities engage pupils suitably and create a positive learning environment.

Important shortcomings in around a half of lessons limit pupils' progress. Often, the pace of these lessons is not matched well enough to pupils' needs and as a result pupils do not sustain their focus on learning. In these lessons, teachers do not plan well enough to develop pupils' understanding. Instead, they plan activities that keep pupils' busy rather than thinking carefully enough about what they want pupils to learn. These lessons do not engage or stimulate the curiosity of pupils well enough, and this contributes to them not making appropriate progress.

Many teachers provide helpful verbal feedback to pupils, for example by addressing misconceptions. However, these teachers do not model or exemplify work well enough. Often, they ask mainly closed questions and do not support pupils to develop their thinking skills. In a few cases, teachers offer pupils valuable feedback on their work and useful opportunities to improve their work or extend their understanding but overall, there is too much variation in the quality of written feedback. It is often too general, or effort related and does not require a response from pupils and limits opportunities for them to improve their work.

Leaders collect a wide range of data at regular intervals. This includes that related to pupils' ability, progress, and engagement. This is analysed and discussed regularly in meetings at strategic points during the year and helps to identify pupils who need additional support.

The school communicates with parents regularly about their child's progress through parents' meetings and a variety of reports. However, there is too much variability in the quality of the reports and in their usefulness. For example, they do not always identify what pupils can do well or what they need to do to improve.

The school's curriculum provides learning experiences that meet the needs and interests of most pupils. This includes a wide and suitable range of courses in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. The school provides helpful information and guidance during the options process and most pupils are able to follow their chosen subjects.

Most pupils have suitable opportunities to develop their Welsh language skills during discrete lessons. A very few pupils who attended a Welsh-medium primary school are given the beneficial opportunity of studying AS level Welsh at Key Stage 4. Apart

from in Welsh lessons, opportunities for pupils to develop the language and celebrate Welsh heritage and culture are limited.

The school has taken an interdisciplinary approach to the implementation of Curriculum for Wales. Teachers have co-constructed a clear vision for the school's curriculum in each area of learning and have established suitable processes to evaluate and refine curriculum design. Staff are beginning to make purposeful links between subjects to enhance pupils' learning. For example, in physical education lessons, pupils determine the amount of energy they have used during exercise and then in food technology make a meal that contains the equivalent calorie count.

Pupils have appropriate opportunities to develop their literacy, numeracy and basic digital skills. However, the school's approach is not systematic enough in ensuring coverage and progression in these skills beyond Year 7. Furthermore, opportunities for pupils to develop their reading skills are limited to a narrow range of subjects. The quality of feedback on pupils' writing skills is too variable and this is limiting progress in key areas, such as spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Skills leaders provide useful support and guidance to teachers to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills. This support also extends to tutors who deliver beneficial reading and numeracy programmes during form time. There are purposeful intervention programmes in place to develop the literacy and numeracy skills of specific pupils.

A well-structured personal and social education (PSE) programme supports pupils to develop the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to make healthy lifestyle choices, for example in relation to healthy eating, relationships, alcohol and substance misuse, and online safety. The school has made beneficial links with external agencies who support and enhance the delivery of the PSE curriculum, for example in relation to the history and experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic and LGBTQ+ communities.

The school provides valuable extra-curricular opportunities for pupils to pursue creative and sporting interests in aspects such as dance, drama, rugby, football and netball.

Care, support and guidance

Staff care deeply about the well-being of pupils and are sensitive to their personal circumstances. The school has an extensive range of tailored provision to meet the needs of pupils who are struggling with their emotional well-being and mental health. For example, specially trained staff are available throughout the day at the Hub, the school's drop-in centre for vulnerable pupils. A few pupils have a Hub pass, which enables them to leave a lesson and seek support or refuge. This provision helps to prevent well-being issues from escalating and supports vulnerable pupils to remain in school and participate as fully as possible in school activities.

The well-being team monitors the impact of support for pupils' well-being closely and provides helpful updates to relevant staff, parents and external agencies. This includes a useful live system and weekly summary update for all staff about matters they need to be aware of relating to pupils.

The school has appropriate provision to support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, the school has a 'health and happiness' programme that uses key dates through the year to promote topical issues and religious events and celebrate diversity and other special activities.

The school's ALN co-ordinator has a thorough overview of provision for pupils with additional learning needs. Individual plans for pupils with ALN take good account of their views, as well as those of parents, staff and relevant external agencies. The plans are clear and set out appropriate strategies and intervention activities that staff generally use effectively to meet the needs of pupils. The plans are reviewed and updated regularly. The school supports the transition of pupils with ALN from primary schools particularly well.

The school has a range of helpful strategies to promote good attendance following the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the school has worked sensitively with the very few learners who were reluctant to return to school after the pandemic, and their families. This has supported these pupils to return and improve considerably their attendance this year compared to last year. The school has more than halved the number of pupils who are persistently absent this year compared with last year, although a few pupils are still persistently absent.

Leaders promote a culture of safeguarding suitably, although a few health and safety issues were identified during the inspection. Staff at all levels are clear about their roles and responsibilities in keeping pupils safe and responding to any concerns they raise or incidents that occur. Staff are trained at an appropriate level and keep up to date with training on a range of topics associated with pupils' welfare and safety. The school has sound systems to record appropriate details about incidents that relate to pupils' well-being and safety and captures information about whether incidents relate to a protected characteristic such as race or sexual orientation. The school carefully notes its actions in response to incidents and updates pupils, parents, staff and external agencies as necessary.

In September 2021, the school introduced a 'relationships policy' that helpfully promotes positive relationships and behaviours. It also sets out how staff should respond to negative behaviours. However, this policy is being implemented inconsistently in lessons across the school. This is a contributing factor behind poor behaviour in a minority of lessons. Additionally, staff do not supervise key areas of the school well enough when pupils are moving between lessons and, as a result, pupils are frequently unchallenged when crowding and pushing other pupils dangerously around narrow corridors, doorways and staircases.

Leadership and management

The acting headteacher is a compassionate leader who has provided stability for the school during a very challenging time. Senior leaders have an appropriate vision for improving the learning experiences pupils receive and securing equity for those experiencing disadvantage. Nearly all staff embrace this vision. Leadership has had a positive impact on aspects such as planning for the new ALN legislation, collaboration between departments in their planning for the Curriculum for Wales and support for pupils' emotional well-being. There is an appropriate safeguarding culture

within the school. However, leaders have not had enough impact on securing consistently high-quality teaching and learning or pupils' behaviour.

Roles and responsibilities across the senior leadership team are distributed sensibly. Line managers are supportive and there is a comprehensive programme of meetings to share information and discuss relevant aspects of the school's work. Most middle leaders are enthusiastic. They have secured high levels of support and care for pupils and are developing interesting learning experiences for them. About a half of subject leaders have suitably high expectations of the quality of teaching, learning and pupils' behaviour in their departments. However, the remainder of these are not sufficiently clear about how to bring about improvements in teaching and learning.

Partnerships with parents and other stakeholders are strong. Senior leaders communicate well with parents through newsletters, the school website and opportunities to share their views with the headteacher in 'open door sessions'.

Governors are supportive of the school and understand their role well including ensuring that the school has suitable arrangements for healthy eating and drinking. They offer appropriate challenge to leaders on many issues and support them well with spending decisions. However, governors have not received realistic enough information about the quality of teaching or learning from leaders in order to challenge or support the school in these aspects.

Together with the business manager, leaders manage spending well. The pupil development grant is used well, for example to support pupils with their numeracy and literacy skills and ensure that they can experience school trips.

The school has a range of performance management procedures that lead to suitable professional learning opportunities. However, these procedures lack rigour because leaders' expectations of the quality of teaching and learning are not always high enough.

The school has a detailed calendar of relevant self-evaluation activities. Senior and middle leaders make appropriate use of pupil feedback and meet with pupil representatives regularly. The school seeks the views of parents through surveys and well attended half termly headteacher open door sessions which are valued highly by parents.

Leaders at all levels draw appropriately on performance data. In addition, first-hand information is gathered through student learning experience trails, peer observations and work scrutiny. Although these activities provide suitable opportunities to gather evidence, they are used largely to gauge compliance with policy and do not focus well enough on the progress that pupils make in subject knowledge or skills. Overall, the whole school self-evaluation processes are not sufficiently robust to enable leaders to develop an accurate picture of the strengths and areas for improvement, particularly in teaching and leadership. Leaders do not synthesise the key messages from a range of evaluation processes to prioritise the main areas in need of improvement. In many areas of the school's work judgements are over generous.

In the main, middle leaders carry out useful activities to review their areas of responsibility that mirror those at a whole school level. Where stronger middle

leaders understand the purpose of self-evaluation well, they focus beneficially on strengths and areas to improve in subject knowledge and skills and on the impact of teaching and assessment. Overall departments focus too heavily on the completion of actions rather than their intended impact on learning.

The broad findings from whole school self-evaluation activity link suitably with overarching priorities that are aligned with all areas of the schools' work. However, success criteria are not sufficiently precise or challenging, and do not focus closely enough on the impact of the school's work on learning, teaching or some aspects of wellbeing. As a consequence, leaders are not able to make secure judgements about the impact of their work.

Staff are encouraged to participate in engaging professional learning activities and to share practice. Most teachers value participation in the 'peer enquiry cycle'. This supports them to work together to engage with research and conduct their own group enquiry projects. Teachers also have beneficial opportunities to engage in pupil trails. Although staff enjoy these features of their professional learning, the activities do not focus on specific aspects of teaching well enough and as a result do not impact fully on the quality of teaching or its impact on learning.

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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