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

A report on

Queen Elizabeth High

Llansteffan Road
Johnstown Road
Carmarthenshire
SA31 3NL

Date of inspection: October 2022

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Queen Elizabeth High

Name of provider	Queen Elizabeth High
Local authority	Carmarthenshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	1346
Pupils of statutory school age	1092
Number in sixth form	250
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 18.5%)	19.7%
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%)	37.5%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	8.8%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	2.6%
Date of headteacher appointment	April 2021
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	January 2014
Start date of inspection	03/10/2022

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

In Queen Elizabeth High School, pupils and staff embrace the headteacher's clearly communicated vision and its key themes of respect, relationships and responsibility. In the short time since his appointment, the headteacher has prioritised well-being for pupils and staff to good effect, and as a result the school community works well together to realise their shared ambitions. A notable strength of the school is practice in the Canolfan Elfed inclusion centre, which caters for pupils with a wide range of needs. Its leaders and staff have created a highly inclusive and nurturing environment where nearly all pupils flourish and make strong progress in relation to their individual targets.

Professional learning for staff has contributed well to improving well-being and strong care, support and guidance. As yet it has not focused closely enough on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning. Although many pupils make sound progress in lessons, in a minority of instances teachers' planning does not consider learning or progress well enough, and, in general, feedback is not sufficiently precise to support pupils to improve their work.

Following a recent reorganisation of roles, senior and middle leaders have assumed their respective roles with enthusiasm. Despite this positive start, further work is required to ensure that leadership roles and their associated responsibilities are all sufficiently clear. Leaders at all levels are beginning to gather information about the school's work using suitable processes. Overall, the evidence they gather is not sufficiently evaluative regarding learning and teaching.

The well-being, inclusion and additional learning needs teams across the school ensure that all pupils benefit from a range of well-considered personalised provision and support. Although attendance has improved since the time of the pandemic, leaders recognise the need to continue to encourage pupils to attend school regularly, particularly those who remain persistently absent, or those eligible for free school meals. The school works effectively with a broad range of outside agencies to support vulnerable pupils well.

Recommendations

R1 Improve teaching so that it makes a consistent impact on pupils' learning

R2 Ensure that leadership responsibilities are clearly defined and equitably distributed

R3 Strengthen improvement planning processes

R4 Strengthen provision to reduce persistent absence and improve the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

Across the school, many pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), make secure progress in their learning and a few pupils make particularly strong progress. In lessons, many recall prior knowledge well and apply this knowledge to new situations successfully. For example, they make links within and across time periods when comparing public health during the industrial revolution and today. Where teaching is less effective, a minority of pupils have limited recall of prior learning. This hinders their ability to make sufficient progress with their new learning.

Most pupils listen respectfully to the teacher and to their peers. Many contribute to class discussion and are confident to answer basic questions. When encouraged to answer in depth or with more detail, the majority of pupils contribute confidently. A minority of pupils provide extended answers explaining their reasoning well. They engage in collaborative talk in pairs, make suitable use of new subject vocabulary and exchange ideas maturely. For example, in mathematics pupils discuss anomalies thoughtfully when calculating averages. A few pupils speak articulately and offer extended oral responses to teachers' questions and justify their thinking.

Nearly all learners read with suitable understanding to retrieve information from simple texts and can identify key themes and ideas. In lessons where pupils are taught specific reading skills, such as how to compare and contrast, many pupils synthesise information suitably from a range of sources. In English, they infer aspects of Scrooge's character accurately from an image of him and the majority of pupils are able to infer characters' feelings from text. In general, pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to apply the reading skills that they develop in their English lessons across the curriculum.

Many pupils organise their work and use paragraphs appropriately. These pupils write extended sentences and use a good range of vocabulary. The majority write clearly for different purposes, such as when considering the challenges of being a parent. More able pupils write fluently, use a wide range of sentence structures and show good awareness of audience in their writing. A minority of pupils make basic spelling and grammar errors.

In mathematics, many pupils demonstrate secure number skills and apply these suitably across the curriculum. They use their understanding of the four rules and the connections between fractions, percentages and decimals to successfully solve a variety of problems. For example, many pupils use number skills correctly to calculate the percentage efficiency of electrical items. Many fluently convert between different metric measures when carrying out calculations. The majority of pupils analyse graphs appropriately, and in science can use them to calculate the difference in rate of photosynthesis as light intensity increases. A few pupils have weak basic number skills. As a result, these pupils struggle to grasp new concepts.

In general, pupils develop their digital skills well across the curriculum. For example, they identify areas of a spreadsheet to test based on functionality. In the sixth form,

pupils studying music use a range of software creatively when composing their own pieces.

When given opportunities, pupils develop their creative and physical skills well. In expressive arts pupils are confident to take risks and try out new imaginative approaches. Pupils make good progress when planning and using their physical skills to develop their stamina and endurance.

Many Welsh second language pupils make strong progress. They retrieve information from a video clip on the use of technology well and communicate their answers confidently. More able pupils write at length and express their views clearly when discussing the advantages and disadvantages of mobile phones. A minority of pupils make basic errors in pronunciation and sentence structure.

Despite their secure ability to speak Welsh, first language pupils lack confidence to answer or contribute to class discussions. Due to the limited opportunities across the curriculum, their Welsh reading and writing skills are less developed and as a result they make only modest progress.

Pupils in Canolfan Elfed make strong progress in line with their individual targets. Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) improve their non-verbal communication skills to help them communicate their basic needs**.** The majority of these pupils can communicate with staff to show how they are feeling. Over time, pupils with autistic spectrum condition (ASC) develop their confidence well and learn important independence skills. As part of their life skills course, they practice mindfulness techniques to help them self-regulate, and showcase their cooking skills in a purpose-built flat. Many pupils progress to further education in college or remain at Canolfan Elfed for their post-16 education.

In the sixth form, most pupils make strong progress in their learning. For example, in business, pupils use spreadsheet functions competently to add and subtract inflows, outflows and cash balances. Nearly all pupils listen well to explanations and to the contributions of their peers and participate willingly in class discussions, explaining their reasoning clearly.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Most pupils feel safe and secure in school. They believe that pupils are treated fairly and that no groups are discriminated against. Most feel that the school deals well with bullying when it occurs and nearly all know where to access support should they require it.

Nearly all pupils understand the importance of diet and exercise as part of a healthy lifestyle, and most have an understanding of appropriate strategies to support good mental health. Pupils benefit from participation in a range of suitable extra-curricular activities such as those targeted at sport, music and performing arts. The whole-school and year group pupil councils offer pupils valuable opportunities to develop leadership skills. These forums are well organised and have influenced change in areas such as school uniform and canteen provision. However, there are limited opportunities for younger pupils to take on leadership roles outside of these groups.

Most younger pupils are enthusiastic about school and older pupils enjoy many aspects of their learning. Supportive and positive working relationships between pupils and adults are evident across the school both in and out of lessons. Most pupils also work effectively and respectfully with one another to complete group tasks. These pupils embrace the school's '3Rs' behaviour code which encompasses respect, relationships, and responsibility. In lessons, many pupils behave well. They settle quickly to tasks, show resilience in completing them and engage positively in discussions when prompted to do so. In a very few instances where classroom management is less effective, a few pupils speak over each other and the teacher and as a result others in the class find it difficult to listen to instructions. Many pupils told us that when this happens it is frustrating for them.

Although attendance has improved compared with last year, when the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact nationally on school attendance, the number of pupils persistently absent continues to be a concern for the school. In addition, pupils eligible for free school meals have a notably higher rate of absence compared to other pupils.

Nearly all sixth form pupils have positive and mature attitudes to their learning. They are keen to succeed, take pride in their work and show independence and confidence. Nearly all listen well to explanations given by teachers and to the contributions of their peers. They contribute willingly to class discussions and explain their viewpoints clearly. Pupils benefit significantly from undertaking a range of leadership roles, for example, acting as heads of house, mentoring younger pupils and supporting extra-curricular sports provision.

Pupils who attend Canolfan Elfed engage very well with their peers and staff. They are supportive and respectful of each other, such as when they participate in science projects or art and design and performance activities. They integrate into wider school life including using the school canteen at lunchtime. A few pupils attend lessons in mainstream where appropriate and they behave well and participate actively. Nearly all of these pupils enjoy and engage in the learning activities planned for them. They are attentive and work very effectively in small groups or individually. Many also take part in a wide range of extra-curricular clubs and activities, including performing arts. For example, nearly all Canolfan Elfed pupils are currently rehearsing for a production of 'The Wizard of Oz'.

Teaching and learning experiences

In most lessons, teachers have positive working relationships with their pupils and create a calm, purposeful learning environment. They have effective routines that ensure that pupils settle well at the start of the lesson. They have secure subject knowledge and are good language models. Where teaching assistants are deployed, teachers ensure that they are utilised effectively to support individuals and small groups within the class.

Many teachers are enthusiastic and provide clear explanations and instructions. They circulate the classroom to monitor how well pupils are progressing. These teachers provide helpful verbal feedback to pupils on how they can improve their work. However, only a minority of teachers use questioning techniques skilfully to deepen pupils' thinking and ensure that they provide extended, well-considered responses.

In the majority of lessons, teaching is effective in ensuring that pupils make good progress. In these lessons, teachers plan purposefully for pupils' learning. They consider carefully what series of activities they should provide so that pupils achieve the learning goals and develop their skills. These teachers provide pupils with a suitably high level of challenge and support them effectively to succeed. In these lessons, teachers use high quality resources that support both the teaching and the learning. They model their expectations clearly and ensure that the pace of teaching closely matches the pace of learning.

In a few lessons there is highly effective teaching. In these instances, teachers are ambitious for their pupils' learning and plan demanding tasks that develop knowledge, understanding and skills strongly. They provide pupils with opportunities to both think deeply and develop their independence. These teachers make skilful use of their subject knowledge and teaching methods to ensure that pupils make rapid progress throughout the lesson. They closely monitor the progress that pupils make and use their findings well to address misconceptions and adapt their teaching.

In a minority of lessons, shortcomings in teaching limit the progress that pupils make. In these lessons, teachers present a series of activities rather than planning carefully what pupils will learn. They do not have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils can achieve, and their planning does not consider well enough the needs of all pupils within the class. Activities in these lessons are often repetitive and do not build well on each other.

In general, the quality of written feedback, both to develop pupils' subject specific learning and to develop their skills, is inconsistent. In the best examples, teachers provide pupils with detailed advice on how they can develop their learning and ensure that pupils respond purposefully to their comments. However, too often teachers' comments are not sufficiently specific. In addition, teachers do not always ensure that pupils respond appropriately.

The school has beneficial arrangements to track pupils' progress and identify those that are underachieving. The school keeps parents and carers well informed about their child's progress through an online app, parents' evenings and regular interim and full reports. Reports to parents include detailed information about the child's achievement and progress, along with helpful targets on how to improve.

The school provides a curriculum that meets the needs of its pupils well, building on their prior learning and their aspirations. A comprehensive range of courses that offer both academic and vocational pathways are available in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. This includes courses in vehicle inspection, hair and beauty, hospitality and public services, and in media studies, law and criminology for post-16 learners. Pupils benefit greatly from the expert advice and support the school provides for making decisions about their future. Those with additional learning needs and those requiring interventions follow an adapted curriculum that meets their needs successfully.

In Canolfan Elfed pupils experience a rich and varied curriculum, and 'what really matters' is a feature in plans and curriculum design plans. Teachers and support staff thoughtfully plan programmes and activities to meet the individual learning needs of pupils. Great care is taken to ensure that all pupils are ready for learning at the start

of the day, through an extensive range of well-being and sensory activities. Specialist staff use skills such as signed speech effectively to engage with pupils with hearing impairment and provide valuable sensory experiences to stimulate engagement and an enjoyment of learning.

In planning for developing pupils' skills in learning, skills coordinators have a clear overview of provision and a strong understanding of priorities for improvement. They have provided valuable training and resources to staff to support them in planning to develop pupils' skills. Across the curriculum, there are beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop their oracy and extended writing skills. However, opportunities to develop their advanced reading skills are not as strong. There are valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their numerical reasoning and problem-solving skills within mathematics. Across the curriculum, there is a suitable range of worthwhile activities for pupils to apply their numeracy skills. The provision to develop pupils' digital skills is strong.

Leaders have a suitable vision for Curriculum for Wales that focuses on the school developing pupils' skills and learning experiences within an inclusive learning environment. The school is trialling and evaluating new approaches to the curriculum. However, as yet this work does not focus well enough on pupils' learning and improving the quality of teaching. Skills coordinators work beneficially with curriculum managers and teachers to plan for the development of pupils' skills within the new curriculum. Consultation with its stakeholders and collaboration with local primary schools and the wider community on the development of Curriculum for Wales is underdeveloped.

The school offers pupils beneficial opportunities to experience and learn about Welsh history and culture. However, pupils who attended Welsh-medium primary schools do not have sufficient opportunities to continue to develop their Welsh language skills, in particular in reading and writing across the curriculum.

The school's personal and social education (PSE) programme is well coordinated and offers valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of the importance of keeping healthy and safe. It reflects the school's ethos of promoting well-being effectively. There is sound provision for the development of pupils' appreciation of the history and culture of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, and LGBTQ+ people.

There is a wide range of beneficial experiences, including educational trips and extra-curricular clubs that complement and enhance the learning of pupils. These include Shakespeare in Schools, Criw Cymraeg and opportunities to study a variety of additional languages, including Italian, Latin, and Ancient Greek.

Care, support and guidance

The school has an inclusive ethos and supports the personal development of its pupils well. Staff have a strong focus on pupils' well-being and an individualised approach to providing support. There are many beneficial links with external agencies, such as the youth and careers services, that supplement the school's work.

The school has effective systems in place for identifying and monitoring the progress of pupils with additional learning needs. Provision for these pupils is a strength of the school and many make at least secure progress in their learning. These pupils have three targets agreed annually specific to their needs. This year, staff have adapted one of these targets to make it subject-specific, so that pupils understand what the target means in practice in different contexts.

Pupils' individual development plans are comprehensive person-centred documents which describe their needs and the strategies staff should use to support them. ALN pupils also have a helpful one-page profile and, generally, staff make effective use of this information in their planning and teaching.

There is a wide range of beneficial interventions for pupils who need extra support with their learning, such as adapted curriculum classes and intensive literacy and numeracy sessions. Vulnerable pupils are able to access various helpful support groups, for example ones focused on managing anger or preventing risky behaviours. A targeted Year 9 programme successfully improves the engagement and behaviour of a small group of pupils through adapting the curriculum. This includes a variety of physical activities, such as building raised beds for gardening, alongside their normal lessons.

Pastoral leaders use a range of appropriate strategies to promote and encourage good attendance. There is a clear system to monitor attendance and regular contact is made with families of pupils whose attendance is lower than it should be. In cases where pupils are unable or unwilling to attend school regularly, staff make considerable efforts to continue to support their educational progress. Nevertheless, persistent absenteeism remains a significant concern following the pandemic.

The school has strengthened its focus on pupils disadvantaged by poverty over the last year. For example, staff monitor the representation of these pupils on different forums, such as the school council, and plan classes carefully to raise these pupils' aspirations and attainment. However, this work has not yet reduced the significant gap in attendance between these pupils and their peers.

The school develops pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness well through aspects of the curriculum, various extra-curricular activities and a well-planned programme of assemblies and collective worship. These activities help pupils to understand their rights and to think about aspects of equality and diversity. However, registration times are too brief to fully promote the school's values and pupils' personal development as planned.

The personal and social education (PSE) programme is well established in Key Stage 3 through fortnightly lessons and regular drop-down sessions. It is being further developed this year through health and well-being lessons in Year 7. PSE provision is responsive to pupils' needs. For example, staff use data effectively from pupil surveys to plan preventative sessions about issues such as peer on peer sexual harassment, drawing on external expertise from the police and medical services when appropriate.

Senior leaders promote and support a culture of safeguarding and well-being effectively throughout the school. Arrangements to keep pupils safe are clear and

robust. Staff work well with a variety of internal and external partners to implement a range of strategies to help pupils keep themselves safe online, safe from exploitation, and to make safe lifestyle choices. The school investigates any incidents of alleged bullying promptly. It keeps detailed records and utilises school staff, external partners, and restorative approaches well to support pupils involved. The family engagement officer works proactively with the most vulnerable families to support attendance and other aspects of well-being.

In Canolfan Elfed, staff have created a highly inclusive and nurturing environment where most pupils flourish and make strong progress in relation to their individual targets. Interventions to support pupils are comprehensively planned to meet their specific needs. Staff work well with a range of agencies to support pupils' needs, and all staff follow carefully designed plans involving specialist teachers, parents and the pupils themselves. As a result, pupils have access to an extensive range of beneficial support. There are planned opportunities for pupils from Canolfan Elfed to integrate into the life of the school. Most pupils with hearing impairments spend the majority of their time in mainstream classes and this has a beneficial impact on their well-being.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school and a strong commitment, built on the principles of equality and diversity, to ensuring that all pupils have every opportunity to achieve their personal best. Since his appointment, he has prioritised developing a staff body that works collaboratively to address the school priorities. In doing this, the headteacher has improved morale and supported staff well-being, creating a caring community which works well together.

Senior leaders provide sound support to the headteacher. A recent restructure of the team has clarified their roles and responsibilities. Consequently, members of the senior leadership team are beginning to develop their understanding of how their new roles contribute to school improvement. Overall, however, there is variability in how effectively they carry out their responsibilities.

Middle leaders have a broad overview of strengths and areas for improvement in their areas of responsibility. Arrangements for middle leaders to meet with line managers to discuss relevant issues are appropriate and nearly all staff feel valued and supported by leaders. Despite this, the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders are not defined well enough. Consequently, improvement priorities are not always addressed with sufficient precision. Only a minority of curriculum leaders have a strong understanding of the specific aspects of teaching that require improvement and the impact teaching has on the progress of pupils.

Leaders pay suitable attention to addressing national priorities. They place a strong emphasis on tackling the impact of poverty on pupils eligible for free school meals or those from low-income households. The school is taking a range of purposeful steps to improve the attainment and well-being of these pupils. This includes targeting individual pupils for additional learning and support, engaging with families and ensuring that these pupils are not disadvantaged by the cost of the school day or limited access to enrichment activities. This work is beginning to make a difference to the progress pupils make, but has not had a sufficient impact on the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals.

The school's professional learning programme broadly aligns with school and national priorities. This provides staff with a wide range of opportunities to engage with effective practice, classroom-based enquiry and specific sessions on reading strategies and trauma-informed practice. Leadership and professional learning regarding the development of the Curriculum for Wales has not secured a sufficiently strong understanding of how learning underpins effective planning and teaching.

The school has an appropriate performance management system that links to current school priorities. Leaders take steps to tackle underperformance when required. Although leaders generally make suitable links between performance management, self-evaluation and professional learning, this is not the case across all aspects of the school's work.

The school has developed a clear, well-understood cycle of self-evaluation and improvement planning activities. Leaders at all levels carry out a comprehensive range of appropriate activities to identify strengths and areas for development. This has led to strong provision in some aspects of the school's work and has helped leaders to identify broad areas for improvement such as pupils' reading skills. However, when evaluating provision, leaders do not distinguish between the features of teaching and learning well enough or evaluate them with rigour or precision. In addition, they do not evaluate provision in the light of its impact on learning. They place too much emphasis on end of key stage outcomes and other data, rather than evaluating the progress that pupils make in lessons over time. In general, the school does not triangulate their findings from the various self-evaluation activities well enough and, therefore, these processes do not enable leaders to identify strengths or areas for improvement clearly or with sufficient accuracy. As a result, leaders view of the school's work is overly positive.

Self-evaluation activities carried out by senior leaders inform whole school planning suitably and identify broad areas for improvement and reflect national priorities. Whole-school and departmental improvement plans are closely aligned. Although leaders identify helpful priorities for improvement, they are not always precise enough about the aspects of their work they are aiming to improve or about what success might look like. This reduces their ability to monitor accurately the impact that actions have on pupil progress.

Canolfan Elfed is well led. The learning manager provides a clear and exciting vision that is well understood by all staff. Leaders have a secure understanding of its strengths and areas for development.

The headteacher, finance manager and governors work industriously to ensure that the budget is stable, and spending provides value for money. The school makes purposeful use of the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) to support the well-being, achievement, and experiences of pupils eligible for free school meals and those from low-income households.

Governors have a broadly secure awareness of most aspects of the schools' priorities and understand their role in supporting and challenging the school. They are proud of the school and carry out their roles diligently. However, their role in ensuring that the school promotes healthy eating and drinking and their scrutiny of the use of the pupil development grant is underdeveloped. Overall, governors make a

valuable contribution to the running of the school, including promoting a culture of safety and well-being.

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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