



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

A report on

Wyclif Independent Christian School

**Wyndham Street
Machen
Caerphilly
CF83 8PU**

Date of inspection: September 2024

by

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

About Wyclif Independent Christian School

Name of provider	Wyclif Independent Christian School
Proprietor status	The school was founded in 1982 and is a registered charity with a board of governors.
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent all age
Residential provision?	No
Number of pupils on roll	197
Pupils of statutory school age	184
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	15/01/2018
Start date of inspection	23/09/2024

School context:

Wyclif Independent Christian School is an all-age, co-educational, independent day school operating from four sites in the village of Machen, near Caerphilly. The school was founded in 1982 and is a registered charity with a board of governors. The current headteacher has been in post since the school was founded.

Wyclif is a Christian school that bases its educational philosophy on mainstream evangelical principles and concepts. The school's practice is founded upon the belief that Christianity is relevant to every area of thought and life, with the Bible as the foundation for both curriculum and moral teaching. The school aims 'to enable each pupil to develop his or her own potential to the full as far as possible'.

The school is organised into four sections: lower primary from K5 (reception) to Year 3; upper primary from Year 4 to Year 6; lower seniors from Year 7 to Year 8; and upper seniors from Year 9 to Year 13. The total number of pupils across the school is 197.

Many pupils travel from a wide catchment around Machen including from Newport, Cardiff, Pontypridd, Pontypool and Merthyr. About 20% of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Most pupils speak English as their first language. A very few pupils speak English as an additional language. A very few pupils speak Welsh as their first language. The school does not aim to make pupils bilingual in English and Welsh.

The school operates an open admissions policy and does not select by ability.

The school was last inspected in 2018.

Summary

Wyclif Independent Christian School is a nurturing and happy community, whose members feel valued and respected as individuals. Strong working relationships among pupils, parents and staff are supported by a shared vision of 'learning through the lens of faith'. Pupils quickly develop a sense of belonging, and their positive behaviour and mutual respect contribute to the school's welcoming atmosphere and family feel.

On joining lower primary, nearly all pupils quickly begin to make sound progress in literacy and numeracy, demonstrating engagement and attentiveness in lessons. As they move through the school, upper primary pupils steadily build their skills and confidence in speaking, writing and mathematics. Most lower senior pupils build effectively on these foundations, alongside appropriate development of their IT (information technology) skills. Nearly all upper senior pupils are prepared appropriately for their public examinations during Years 11 to 13. Throughout the school, pupils of all ages make strong and regular use of their developing creative skills.

In the majority of lessons, teachers' strong subject knowledge and high expectations lead to effective learning and progress. However, the quality of teaching and learning across the school is too variable and, as a result, pupils in a minority of lessons do not make the progress of which they are capable.

The school's curriculum meets the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024. However, provision for personal and social education, and for pupils' understanding of other faiths is underdeveloped.

Senior leaders embody the school's ethos and are well-respected by staff, pupils and parents. They provide effective operational management, but their capacity for self-evaluation and strategic planning is limited by factors including their substantial teaching commitments and unclear role definitions. The governing body focuses on operational oversight rather than strategic improvement, further limiting accountability. Leaders' limited quality assurance activities are insufficient to develop a strategic overview of the quality of teaching and resulting pupil progress.

Appropriate safeguarding policies are in place, and staff are trained to respond to concerns. However, the school's broader safeguarding culture requires strengthening and it must address identified concerns with related procedures.

The school is not fully compliant with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024.

Main evaluation

Community, ethos and well-being

Wyclif Independent Christian School is a friendly and caring school, which uses a shared belief in Christian values to create a school community where members are valued and respected. Strong working relationships exist between pupils, parents and staff, all of whom are committed to a shared vision of 'learning through the lens of faith'. The school applies its Christian ethos appropriately to inform and underpin learning across all age groups.

School leaders, particularly the headteacher and deputy headteacher, have successfully established a nurturing culture where every pupil is recognised and celebrated for the unique contribution they make to school life. Leaders are well-respected, highly visible and accessible, and work tirelessly to lead the school by example, with sensitivity and compassion.

The school provides an environment in which, irrespective of background, children can flourish emotionally and socially. On joining the school, nearly all pupils rapidly develop a strong sense of belonging, of being valued, and of being known as individuals. Pupils greet guests with enthusiasm and kindness; their welcoming and friendly demeanour is a hallmark of the school.

Nearly all pupils appreciate the strong sense of community and togetherness that permeates the school. They value the frequent opportunities to come together with pupils of different ages, both to socialise and to worship. Pupils' conduct around the school is characterised by calm demeanour and high levels of mutual respect. There are very few reports of bullying or instances of unkindness.

Pupils are encouraged to take collective responsibility for their school. They come together effectively to ensure that, although resources are limited, the environment is conducive to learning. Many pupils appreciate the opportunities for leadership and service available to them, including helping to run school events in their roles as team captains, and organising and running cleaning teams.

Most pupils display a strong sense of caring about humanity and of respect for others, showing a valuable awareness of the need to respect those less fortunate than or different to themselves. Lower senior pupils articulate this through references to Christian concepts of kindness and charity.

Learning and teaching

Pupils joining lower primary quickly begin to make sound progress in developing their phonics and communications skills. For example, they develop their knowledge of blended sounds and begin to recognise the structure of a sentence. Over time these skills are further developed and, by Year 3, many pupils can successfully decode unfamiliar words and are reading with appropriate fluency and accuracy.

Most lower primary pupils listen attentively to each other and to their teacher, responding swiftly and suitably to prompts and directions. For example, most reception pupils recall the story of the 'enormous turnip' successfully using visual aids. They are enthusiastic learners, readily engaging visitors in conversations in which they are eager to explain what they are doing.

Pupils' understanding of the foundations of mathematics develops suitably during the lower primary phase of the school. Many of the youngest pupils demonstrate an agility with numbers less than 10 and, by the beginning of Year 2, many pupils can recognise odd and even numbers, use numbers up to 300 and are beginning to understand analogue time.

Pupils' fine and gross motor skills develop successfully through related and well-conceived activities in class and during free play time both indoors and outdoors. For example, the youngest pupils build figures out of vegetables using cocktail sticks and Year 1 pupils thread and weave, and make colourful leaf rubbing pictures.

In upper primary, pupils continue to develop in their confidence, speaking to both their peers and adults, including visitors. By Year 6, many pupils read aloud confidently, accurately and with fluency.

Pupils' writing skills develop suitably over time. For example, by the end of Year 4, most pupils can write accurately at length using paragraphs, capital letters and full stops. In Year 5, nearly all pupils correctly split words into syllables to demonstrate that their poems are in haiku form.

Nearly all upper primary pupils use their creative skills highly effectively when engaging in communal music making. For example, all pupils in Years 4 to 6 come together to use voices and percussion in a seven-part rendition of 'Rhythm of Life'.

Developing advanced numeracy and analytical reading skills

Upper primary pupils continue to develop their numeracy skills at a suitable level, for example rounding numbers to the nearest million and developing their ability to work with units of length and capacity.

As they move through the senior school, pupils apply their reading skills successfully with a broader range of purposes. Nearly all pupils read texts effectively for meaning, to extract information, and to analyse structure. For example, Year 10 pupils compare and contrast examples of travel writing including Ma Jian's 'Red Dust' and Colette Rossant's 'Apricots on the Nile'. They identify and assess authors' use of sentence structure, sensory language and perspective to create atmosphere.

Pupils' writing skills develop appropriately over time. Most write for different purposes and use scaffolding well to aid the structure of analytical pieces. Many pupils make effective use of vocabulary to create effective descriptions. GCSE history pupils apply their literacy skills effectively when writing at length in response to examination questions, for example when explaining why Elizabeth I never married.

Numeracy skills develop suitably as pupils progress through the senior section. Most Year 7 pupils can define an absolute number and correctly apply the order of mathematical operations to calculations. Year 12 pupils apply their numeracy skills effectively, accurately drawing line graphs in order to interpret data from practical experiments.

Many senior school pupils develop their IT skills appropriately over time. For example, Year 8 pupils use specialist publishing software to design their own school newsletter, populating it with self-penned articles about their hobbies and interests.

Nearly all pupils develop their creative skills suitably in a variety of forms. For example, Year 7 develop their ability to sketch by drawing their hands in the style of Albrecht Durer, and Year 8 represent Van Gogh's 'Starry Night' using pastels. In Years 12 and 13, pupils work independently on still life drawing, replicating paintings using different media. In the last Eisteddfod, pupils dramatically interpreted poems of their choice. Nearly all pupils enthusiastically participate in opportunities to sing, both as part of the curriculum and during communal worship.

Positive learning attitudes and collaborative spirit among senior pupils

As a result of the secure working relationships fostered by teachers, many pupils display highly positive attitudes to learning. Across the school, both in and outside of lessons, senior pupils co-operate and work together in a spirit of generosity, enjoyment and mutual encouragement. For example, pupils come together to engage enthusiastically in quiz challenges.

The school provides pupils with a curriculum which meets the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024. However, opportunities for pupils to study technology, to participate in sport, and to deepen their understanding of other faiths are limited. In addition, the ranges of subjects available to pupils at GCSE and A Level are limited.

In the primary and upper senior school, the school curriculum is supported by suitable schemes of work. These build systematically on pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills to secure progression as pupils move through the school. However, planning, particularly in the lower senior section, does not always identify opportunities for pupils to build their broader skills in literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.

Personal and social education and its impact on pupil progress

Provision for personal and social education is underdeveloped. As a result of a lack of systematic and progressive planning, pupils may miss the opportunity to address important aspects of this subject. When preparing pupils for adult life, there is an expectation that aspects such as sexuality and relationships education is taught by families. As a result, pupils do not consistently benefit from opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding in this area.

In the best lessons, teachers employ their strong subject knowledge, and their understanding of the requirements of public examinations effectively to drive pupils' progress. These teachers have high expectations of pupils and provide a range of well-conceived and suitably challenging learning activities. Teachers' high-quality questioning is a key component of the strongest practice. In these lessons, the pace of learning and activity is brisk. Teachers skilfully transition between activity, assessment, feedback and return to learning. As a result, pupils in these lessons make effective progress.

However, in a minority of lessons, teaching and learning is less effective. In these lessons activities are not well-matched to the individual needs and abilities of pupils, and teachers' expectations of pupils are too low. The direction and pace of learning are too rigid and, as a result, pupils are constrained from progressing their learning independently or from completing learning activities at their own pace.

Most teachers provide pupils with effective verbal feedback. However, the quality and regularity of written feedback is less consistent and does not always ensure that pupils know what they need to do to improve their work.

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning across the school is too variable.

Leadership and strategic direction

Through regular and well organised meetings, leaders maintain secure operational management of the school. Records of these meetings demonstrate that leaders successfully complete short term action points. However, their discussions miss the opportunity to support longer term, strategic improvement.

Leaders at the school have a significant teaching commitment that they combine with their leadership responsibilities. With finite financial and human resources at their disposal, leaders have made the decision to prioritise the time they spend teaching and, as a result, their capacity to undertake work to support the school's strategic development is limited.

Leaders and staff work collegiately to manage the school's operations. However, the roles and responsibilities of staff, particularly those of senior leaders, are not defined and distributed clearly enough. The resultant lack of defined accountability negatively impacts leaders' capacity to manage important aspects of the school. In addition, the governing body does not effectively hold leaders to account. As a result, on a few occasions, important processes lack rigour and have resulted in significant shortcomings.

Quality assurance and planning for improvement

Governors' oversight focuses too greatly upon operational matters, rather than challenging leaders to identify and implement improvements. Minutes of meetings demonstrate that governors have a suitable oversight of the school's operation and

activity. However, there is very limited evidence of the discussion, agreement and tracking of strategic improvement priorities.

Leaders do not undertake a suitable range of quality assurance activities to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's provision, such as gathering and analysing available information on pupil outcomes. As a result, leaders do not have a clear understanding of the progress that pupils make over time, nor have they identified, and worked to address, the inconsistencies in the effectiveness of teaching at the school.

The school is developing its understanding of the breadth of a robust safeguarding culture. Appropriate policies are in place that reflect Welsh Government guidance, and the deputy designated safeguarding person (DDSP) provides useful update training for all staff. Staff understand their responsibilities for safeguarding the pupils in their care and can confidently explain the processes for responding to safeguarding concerns. A few issues were raised with the school during the inspection.

Compliance with the regulations for registration

Independent school inspections are governed by the Education Act 2002 and related regulations: the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024. These regulations require an independent school to meet an appropriate standard in the following areas:

The quality of education provided by the school

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The suitability of proprietors and staff

The school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Although the school meets most of the regulatory requirements for this standard, in order to comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024 the school should:

- Prior to the appointment of any member of staff to work at the school, where the prospective member of staff is an individual in respect of whom the Secretary of State must issue a disclosure and barring certificate under

section 113A of the Police Act 1997, the proprietor ensures that the individual has applied for an appropriate disclosure and barring certificate; and the individual makes the certificate available to the proprietor.

- Prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff, carry out appropriate checks to confirm their identity, medical fitness, previous employment history, character references and where appropriate qualifications and professional references and take into account information in determining whether their appointment will be confirmed.

Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

The school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Although the school meets almost all of the regulatory requirements for this standard, in order to comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024 the school should:

- Ensure effective security arrangements for all school buildings.
- Provide a legionella risk assessment.

The provision of information

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Safeguarding

Site security as detailed in report

Several external doors to Senior School buildings are unlocked. External doors do not provide restricted access, and external perimeters, although clear, do not prevent easy access/egress.

Safer recruitment shortcomings as detailed in report

Safer recruitment checks do not meet requirements of the ISSR 2024 (see supporting evidence under Standard 4.

Recommendations

We have made five recommendations to help the school continue to improve:

- R1 Address the issues raised in the safeguarding letter
- R2 Comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024
- R3 Strengthen the broader safeguarding culture of the school to ensure that all aspects of the school's activity are informed by best practice
- R4 Increase the rigour of self-evaluation and improvement planning to provide a clear strategic focus on the quality of provision and pupil progress
- R5 Improve consistency in the quality of teaching and assessment

What happens next

Since the school does not meet the standards required for registration, the Welsh Government will require the proprietor to submit an action plan within a specified period of time. This plan will set out the steps that the school will take to meet the standards, and the timescale within which it will complete each step. The Welsh Government may then request Estyn to support the school through an improvement process.

Estyn advises the proprietor to amend its current development plan to show what actions the school intends to take in response to the recommendations. It is also advisable to circulate this plan, or a summary of it, to all parents/carers at the school.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from parent/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and support staff through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors/proprietor(s), leaders 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
- visit lessons and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning
- 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 had 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 (where appropriate), 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

Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. '*most pupils...*' or '*very few pupils...*'. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

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 163 of the Education Act 2002. The main purpose of inspection under this section is to report on compliance with the Independent Schools Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024. In schools that provide non-maintained nursery education, this report also satisfies the requirements of Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework.

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:

Publications Section
Estyn
Anchor Court, Keen Road
Cardiff
CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

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