

A report on

Gowerton School

Cecil Road

Gowerton

SA4 3DL

Date of inspection: December 2024

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About Gowerton School

Name of provider	Gowerton School
Local authority	City and County of Swansea
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	N/A
Number of pupils on roll	1137
Pupils of statutory school age	1040
Number in sixth form	98
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 21.1%)	17.9%
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 11.2%)	14.6%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.5%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	1.3%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2022
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/03/2017
Start date of inspection	02/12/2024

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.

Summary

All members of Gowerton School community are valued, supported and respected. Leaders and staff at all levels have worked collaboratively to ensure that a strong culture of safeguarding is central to the school's work. Care, support and guidance are a strength of the school and have a positive impact on, for example, pupils' well-being.

Many pupils are friendly and welcoming and demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. They are engaged in their learning and sustain concentration well. A few are too easily distracted and have difficulty sustaining concentration. The majority of pupils make appropriate progress in lessons. However, a minority of teachers do not always plan lessons that consistently challenge and meet the needs of all pupils.

Leaders and staff are committed to developing their Curriculum for Wales, and there are useful opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy, digital and Welsh language skills. Although leaders pay appropriate attention to several key national priorities, there remains significant work to be done to see the required impact on aspects such as the progressive development of pupils' literacy skills and the quality of teaching.

The headteacher has developed a strong sense of teamwork amongst staff and considers pupil and staff well-being carefully. Although leaders work well together, roles and responsibilities are not equitable, there is a lack of clear, strategic leadership and they do not hold staff to account fully. They do not have a sufficiently rigorous approach to gathering evidence from activities such as learning walks and book reviews and are therefore unable to plan for improvement effectively.

Effective provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) helps them to make suitable progress against their individual targets. The specialist teaching facility (STF) provides a caring environment. Staff are successful in supporting pupils to make strong progress from their starting points, particularly in relation to their social and communication skills. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is suitably broad and balanced, although the cost of the curricular offer in the sixth form is not evaluated closely enough. The school provides a suitable programme of creative, sporting and cultural extra-curricular opportunities for pupils during and after school hours as well as a wide variety of educational visits and enrichment activities, which complement the curriculum.

Recommendations

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

- R1 Refine the roles and responsibilities of all senior leaders and ensure that they are held to account robustly
- R2 Strengthen self-evaluation processes so that leaders have an accurate view of the school's areas for development and plan for improvement precisely
- R3 Improve the quality of teaching to address the shortcomings identified in the report
- R4 Improve the provision for the progressive development of pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum, in particular reading and writing
- R5 Improve attendance

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 findings

Teaching and learning

In the majority of lessons, pupils make adequate progress in the development of their knowledge, understanding and skills. In a very few instances, they make stronger progress. However, in a minority of classes where there are important shortcomings in teaching, pupils make only limited progress. Many pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) make suitable progress against their personal targets.

Teaching, assessment and attitudes to learning

In general, teachers demonstrate strong subject knowledge and foster positive relationships with pupils. In the majority of lessons, teachers plan a range of activities to build on prior learning and use helpful resources to support pupils' progress. Overall, the level of challenge and pace of learning in these lessons is appropriate. Teachers question pupils suitably to check understanding before moving the learning on.

In a very few lessons where pupils make strong progress, teachers have high expectations of their pupils, ask incisive questions and ensure a brisk pace to learning.

In a minority of lessons, pupils make limited progress because of important shortcomings in teaching. In these lessons, teachers:

- do not provide pupils with sufficient challenge
- focus on what they want pupils to do rather than what they should learn
- provide only limited worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy skills
- do not use questioning well enough to develop pupils' thinking
- do not adapt their teaching to meet the individual needs of pupils

In a few cases, teachers use effective strategies to assess pupils' learning and provide helpful specific feedback. As a result, these pupils improve their work suitably. However, in many cases, teachers do not provide feedback that allows pupils to know precisely what they need to do to improve their work.

Many pupils demonstrate a positive attitude to their learning. They are punctual, settle quickly and behave appropriately. The majority listen well to their teachers and show an interest in their work. However, a few pupils have a negative attitude towards learning. They struggle to maintain concentration and do not complete enough work. In the few

lessons where pupils do not conduct themselves appropriately, teachers do not have high enough expectations of pupils' behaviour or manage it well enough.

Literacy skills

Currently, there are limited worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy skills across the curriculum. Often, this is because the provision for them to do so is not evaluated robustly enough.

Many pupils are adept at basic information retrieval from various sources such as propaganda images and historical sources. A minority analyse an author's use of language and actions to deduce characteristics of fictional characters and how they represent wider themes. Pupils in Key Stage 3 do not develop their advanced reading skills well enough due to a lack of opportunities and too many scaffolded activities that restrict their independent learning. Overall, pupils do not use a sufficient range of reading strategies to support their learning.

A majority of pupils listen attentively so they are able to make useful contributions to class discussions and ask any questions for clarification in a timely manner. A few pupils speak with particular fluency and confidence using a wide vocabulary and accurate subject terminology. A minority are reluctant to contribute answers orally and struggle to articulate themselves clearly when asked a direct question. The most common reasons for this include the limitations of their vocabulary, not maintaining focused listening, or shortcomings in teachers' questioning.

Generally, pupils have a secure sense of the purpose of their writing though they have a more limited sense of audience and make incorrect language choices, so their writing lacks the correct tone. A few pupils produce technically secure writing that engages the readers' interest successfully by presenting clearly articulated arguments debating, for example, whether the Talmud or the Torah is the most important writing for Jews. Around half of pupils write with technical accuracy and structure their writing well, although a similar proportion continue to make too many basic errors. This is often because teachers do not always present secure language models and their inconsistent application of marking for literacy contributes to perpetuating basic errors in pupils' writing.

Numeracy and digital skills

Opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy and digital skills are suitably planned and coordinated. Most pupils demonstrate a strong understanding of fundamental operations, such as multiplication and division. However, a few younger pupils find it

difficult to convert quantities such as amounts of money between pounds and pence. A minority of pupils are overly reliant on calculators to solve basic calculations.

Many pupils use basic statistical techniques effectively, such as when calculating measures like the mean and mode. A majority of pupils can substitute values into formulae competently, applying these skills in meaningful contexts. By Year 10, many pupils develop a secure understanding of more advanced concepts, including factorising quadratic expressions. A few pupils do not routinely check the reasonableness of their answers, and this limits the reliability of their work.

A majority of pupils construct and plot scatter graphs accurately although a minority struggle with this aspect, particularly when working with scales. However, teachers do not always offer them suitable opportunities to analyse trends or relationships.

The provision for developing pupils' digital skills is well coordinated. Across the curriculum, departments offer pupils a range of purposeful activities. For example, they use spreadsheets effectively to calculate measures such as food miles, create graphs, and perform complex tasks like creating animations and adapting photographs digitally in their art lessons.

Welsh

The school supports pupils effectively to develop their Welsh language skills. Generally, pupils have a positive attitude towards the Welsh language and make an effort to speak the language during their lessons. Many answer questions in Welsh using full sentences, pronounce Welsh vocabulary appropriately, and translate basic words from Welsh to English accurately. When given the opportunity and encouragement, many hold short conversations in Welsh and a minority are able to converse independently without depending too much on sentence builders to help them. Many pupils identify key details and information in simple reading texts and when writing, structure basic sentences effectively. However, many pupils rely too heavily on structures and scaffolding and lack confidence to attempt to speak or write in Welsh without them.

The school provides valuable opportunities for pupils to develop an understanding of their identity and heritage through learning about Wales and its history. Pupils benefit from worthwhile opportunities to take part in activities that develop their knowledge of Welsh culture, such as when taking part in the school and Urdd Eisteddfod. The 'Cryw Cymraeg' works closely and effectively with partner primaries on developing and promoting pupils' experiences of Welsh culture and language.

Sixth form

Sixth form students have positive attitudes to their work, are enthusiastic and engage well in lessons. They listen well to explanations and to the contributions of their peers. They are able to talk confidently about their work and participate willingly in class discussions, explaining their reasoning clearly.

Curriculum

The school has trialled, evaluated, and evolved its vision for the Curriculum for Wales. Leaders have a clear vision, built on the school's values and learning experiences that reflect the nature and context of the school. The school has worked closely with partner primary schools that form the North Gower Partnership (NGP) to develop a shared vision and to plan a curriculum that builds suitably on pupils' prior learning. In the strongest examples, teachers provide valuable opportunities for pupils to learn about their 'cynefin', or local area. For example, in Year 8 humanities lessons, pupils develop their knowledge and understanding of their locality and Wales during the Second World War. However, the activities provided do not always focus enough on improving pupils' cross-curricular literacy skills.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum in Key Stage 4 that meets the needs of its pupils well. There is a wide range of courses, offering both academic and vocational subjects and there are well-established links with other local schools which enhance the curriculum offer for more able pupils. Pupils in Key Stage 4 who access an alternative provision follow a worthwhile adapted curriculum that meets their needs. Although the school offers a range of academic option subjects for the sixth form pupils, it does not offer any vocational courses. Leaders, including governors, do not review the suitability and cost of the curricular offer in the sixth form closely enough to plan appropriate adjustments.

Pupils in the specialist teaching facility (STF) benefit from worthwhile support. They are given valuable learning experiences and strong support to develop their social and communication skills. Many attend mainstream classes for most of the week. Leaders capture valuable feedback from teaching assistants and use this information to review, plan and where appropriate challenge teachers on the progress being made by pupils. However, the overall planning of provision and tracking of the progress that STF pupils make in mainstream classes is less well developed.

The personal and social education (PSE) programme is well co-ordinated and provides valuable learning experiences for pupils. Staff make effective use of well-being data and

pupil surveys to plan a programme of activities, tailored to pupils' needs that supports the development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and emotional skills. Leaders refine the programme suitably in response to current local matters and pupil feedback. For example, there is now a greater focus on mental health education and the importance of keeping pupils safe online. In addition, the school has carefully designed its Relationship & Sexuality provision to create an age-appropriate curriculum for its pupils.

The school provides a wide range of beneficial experiences, including visits to universities, local employers and educational trips that complement and enhance the learning of pupils. These include visits to Llangrannog and a senior prefect visit to Ypres where pupils lay a wreath at the Welsh Memorial to remember the fallen of Gowerton School. The worthwhile extra-curricular offer includes a coding club, music groups and various sporting clubs.

Well-being, care, support and guidance

There is a positive and calm sense of community in Gowerton School. Most pupils are friendly and courteous, exemplifying the school's focus on kindness. They engage maturely with visitors. Many pupils say that they feel safe in school. Most feel free from bullying and harassment and are confident that the school deals with it effectively when it occurs.

The school has a comprehensive approach to supporting pupils' health and emotional well-being. 'Gofal' is the school's centre for helpful, tailored support for individuals and small groups. Staff working in 'Gofal' care deeply for the pupils. They work well with families and external agencies to meet pupils' needs.

The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils have a good understanding of issues relating to diversity as a result of valuable curriculum activities, assemblies, special events and clubs. For example, younger pupils value an assembly on disability discrimination led by a sixth form pupil. Almost all teachers promote equality and inclusion well. Pupils across the school, including those in the STF, benefit from a rich range of lunchtime and after-school activities that support pupils' social skills, for example, the pupil-initiated 'Positivity Rocks' club. There are valuable opportunities for pupils to develop leadership skills through pupil-led groups such as the 'Cryw Cymraeg' and sixth form students coaching various sporting teams.

Over the past two years, the school has taken positive steps to improve attendance. School leaders analyse attendance data carefully and have established a range of effective interventions in partnership with the local community. This includes rewarding and

celebrating good attendance and improving the capacity to work with families. The family liaison officer makes regular home visits to build relationships with families. The school has also raised families' awareness of the importance of good attendance. Between 2018-2019 and 2023-2024, the school's attendance rate fell similarly to what was seen nationally. While there was an increase in the attendance rate last year compared with the previous year, this increase was smaller than the increase seen nationally. The attendance rates of pupils who are eligible for free school meals have declined. However, they are higher than the national average.

The consistent implementation of the school's five-stage behaviour policy by most staff ensures clear expectations for pupils. The policy is reinforced by a team of pastoral support staff who respond swiftly to minimise disruption in lessons. The 'Ready to Learn' room is used appropriately to encourage reflection and restorative practices, allowing pupils who are removed from lessons to return quickly. Leaders have clear oversight of individual pupils' behaviour and, as a result of the school's supportive approaches, exclusions are relatively low. Despite this, in a few instances, the behaviour of some pupils disrupts the learning of others.

The school council plays an important role in improving aspects of school life. Its work has resulted in beneficial changes such as additional water fountains around the site and increasing the number of practical science lessons. However, pupils across the school are not always fully aware of the council's activity and do not have enough opportunities to share their views on learning and teaching.

The school provides beneficial support to help pupils transition to the school. As pupils progress through the school, they receive useful advice and guidance on their next steps in learning, especially in preparing to take options in Year 10 and deciding what to do at the end of Year 11. Pupils in the sixth form feel particularly well supported through their studies and in preparing for university, training or employment at the end of Year 13.

The school has made strong progress in implementing the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act. It plans appropriate provision for pupils with ALN, taking good account of their views and those of their parents. Staff are provided with useful profiles of pupils and every classroom has a 'universal provision station' with helpful resources to support all pupils to access learning activities. Although staff track and monitor closely the progress of pupils with ALN in relation to specific learning targets, they do not track the wider progress in learning of these pupils in mainstream classes well enough.

Staff in the STF know the needs of their pupils well and have developed strong and trusting relationships with them. They make effective use of information from parents, for example, to provide support for pupils in understanding and managing anxiety, discussing the importance of personal hygiene and learning how to disagree with others respectfully. In addition, pupils have sought support in developing their understanding of finance and looking for jobs. Over time and with the sensitive support of staff, pupils develop their social skills, learn to be more tolerant of others and develop a better understanding of their own emotions and how to respond appropriately to others.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding and child protection are robust and clearly understood by staff, who respond to any concerns in a timely manner. Staff complete useful and regular training to help them understand their safeguarding responsibilities effectively, including how to identify any pupils at risk of radicalisation. Leaders also ensure that pupils understand the importance of keeping themselves safe and know how to report any concerns they may have. Leaders have fostered strong links with external agencies who contribute valuably to the school's wider culture of safeguarding.

Leading and improving

The headteacher is strongly committed to Gowerton School and places a high importance on pupil and staff well-being. While the roles of the headship team are clearly delineated, they have too many responsibilities which limits their capacity to act strategically. In addition, there are shortcomings in the distribution of middle leadership roles to the senior team. As a result, senior leaders do not have sufficient strategic oversight of the roles and responsibilities of middle leaders, and this leads to a lack of clear and consistent direction for these staff.

Over time, leadership has positively impacted on some key areas such as the school's safeguarding culture, Welsh language development, and planning for digital and numeracy skills. Leaders communicate well with parents and the wider community especially through their website which includes regular newsletters and useful information. However, leadership has not had enough impact on the quality of teaching, the development of literacy skills or levels of accountability.

Professional development reviews are suitable and leading to meaningful professional learning opportunities for staff. Line management arrangements are supportive, but they do not offer enough challenge to drive improvement.

Curriculum leaders have a suitable understanding of their subject areas and are enthusiastic about the Curriculum for Wales. They meet regularly with their departments

to share effective practice. Most have a competent understanding of data. However, in general, they do not have a strong enough understanding of the specific strengths and areas for improvement in teaching and learning in their departments. They do not hold staff accountable for the quality of their teaching strongly enough.

The governing body is supportive of the school and offers modest levels of challenge. However, governors' understanding of areas for improvement in teaching, learning and leadership is limited. They do not, for example, have a clear grasp of how well the school canteen is providing healthy food and do not provide an evaluation of this aspect in their annual report.

The school's budget is managed appropriately enabling leaders to allocate resources appropriately. There is appropriate use of the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) and other grants. However, over time, leaders, including the governing body, have not monitored financial matters closely enough. For example, leaders have not analysed the value for money provided by the sixth form.

Curriculum middle leaders carry out a suitable range of self-evaluation activities. In addition to listening to learners, middle leaders undertake learning and 'product' reviews, based on the school's 'EPIC' framework. This prompts them to consider whether teaching offers suitable challenge to engage pupils, and to enable them to make progress and work independently. However, their reflections are overly positive and offer too limited a view of pupil progress and the quality of teaching. Their reflections are based on a limited range of information and do not focus well enough on the progressive development of pupils' skills.

Quality assurance processes lack rigour, and do not enable senior leaders to hold middle leaders to account well enough. Senior leaders trust the judgements of middle leaders without ensuring they are based on sound evaluation of the most important aspects of the school's work, such as the impact of teaching on pupils' learning. In addition, they do not aggregate the findings from middle leaders' reviews to form a view on the quality of teaching or of pupils' learning and progress at a whole-school level. As a result, self-evaluation processes do not inform improvement planning well enough. Consequently, the school has not made enough progress against this recommendation from the last inspection.

Professional learning opportunities are helpful and informative but are not sufficiently targeted to individual needs. Staff value regular opportunities to work collaboratively, for example on leadership programmes and the unseen and '+1' (peer) observations.

However, the evaluation of professional learning in light of its impact on learning is limited.

Leaders have well-established and supportive partnerships, for example with local primary schools across the North Gower Partnership. They are a lead school for Initial Teacher Education and, as a result, staff in the school benefit from their links to higher education and research updates.

Additional information

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not give any cause for concern.

The school's arrangements for site management do not give any cause for concern.

The school has appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking.

Leaders and governors manage the school's finances appropriately, including the use of the pupil development grant.

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

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 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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