

A report on

St Gerard's School Trust

**Ffriddoedd Road
Bangor
Gwynedd
LL57 2EL**

Date of inspection: March 2025

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About St Gerard's School Trust

Name of provider	St Gerard's School Trust
Proprietor status	Charitable Trust
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent all age
Residential provision?	No
Number of pupils on roll	101
Pupils of statutory school age	95
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	23/05/2022
Start date of inspection	11/03/2025

School context:

St Gerard's School Trust is an independent day school for pupils from the age of 4 to 18 years. The school is situated in the town of Bangor in North Wales. The school was founded in 1917 by the Sisters of Mercy and, although it has a Catholic foundation, it has a long tradition of welcoming pupils of all faiths and none. The school became a lay charitable trust in 1990.

There are currently 101 pupils on roll. These include 17 in the junior school, aged from four to eleven years, and 84 in the senior school, of whom 6 are in the sixth form.

The school has a wide catchment area that covers the Llŷn Peninsula, Snowdonia and the counties of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy and Denbighshire. A few pupils speak Welsh as a first language or to an equivalent standard, and the school offers Welsh up to A Level.

New pupils may join the school at any stage, depending on the availability of places. There is no pre-entry assessment of pupils for the junior school and most pupils transfer from the junior school to the senior school at the end of Year 6. New pupils who wish to join the senior school from Year 7 onwards take assessments in literacy and numeracy to help ensure that the school can meet their needs.

The headteacher was appointed in September 2016 and is supported by two deputy headteachers.

The school's last core inspection was in May 2022.

Summary

St Gerard's School is a welcoming and inclusive environment where pupils, staff, and parents share a common goal of promoting learning, wellbeing, and ambition. The school fosters strong professional relationships, with staff using an effective blend of praise, encouragement, and challenge to build pupil confidence and engagement. This approach leads to high-quality outcomes, with nearly all pupils taking pride in their work and engaging eagerly with learning activities.

Teachers at St Gerard's use effective questioning to promote curiosity, critical thinking and independent learning. They ensure lessons are academically rigorous, connecting prior knowledge to new material and keeping the pace of learning high. Empathy and support are key features, ensuring no pupil is left behind. The school has a well-coordinated approach to inclusion, working effectively to create individualised learning strategies supported by detailed pupil profiles. This ensures that pupils receive tailored support within a nurturing environment.

Pupils at St Gerard's readily embrace challenge and are unafraid of making mistakes in their pursuit of excellence. They exhibit curiosity and perseverance, proudly sharing their achievements with others. Nearly all pupils appreciate the school's supportive atmosphere, and their behaviour reflects the school's focus on kindness and respect. Most pupils are confident speakers and skilled listeners, with many older pupils demonstrating advanced argumentation and summation skills.

The school has made rapid and significant progress in addressing the recommendations from its last inspection. Refined structures and processes, including those related to quality assurance, allow leaders to plan effectively for improvement. Senior leaders work collaboratively to provide strong strategic and operational leadership. This approach supports rapid progress for pupils in both academic and pastoral areas.

A newly appointed personal, social and health education (PSHE) and careers coordinator ensures that the PSHE curriculum is well-planned, promoting self-esteem and covering topics like relationships, health, and wellbeing. These themes are reinforced through assemblies and integrated effectively into the wider curriculum. Careers guidance for older pupils centres around tailored support for career planning and future pathways, including lessons that promote financial literacy and develop employability skills.

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

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard

The suitability of proprietors and staff

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard

Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard

The provision of information

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard

The manner in which complaints are to be handled

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard.

Recommendations

We have made one recommendation to help the school continue to improve:

R1. Continue to implement and embed the school's current improvement priorities.

What happens next

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.

Main evaluation

St Gerard's is a happy, safe school where pupils, parents and staff share in a common purpose founded on inclusivity, ambition and high expectations. All members of the close-knit school community actively promote and sustain a calm, nurturing environment which enables pupils to thrive.

Across the school there is a shared ambition for learning that is built upon strong nurturing professional relationships. Staff know pupils extremely well and use a skilful blend of praise, encouragement, humour and challenge to build confidence and engagement. Nearly all pupils take pride in their work, engaging readily with activities and learning. As a result, most pupils produce high quality work.

Effective questioning is a consistent feature of teaching throughout the school. Most teachers use open, probing questions to provide challenge, to encourage critical thinking and to promote independent learning. Lessons across the school have clear academic rigour, with many lessons providing pupils with opportunities to be curious and to explore. Teachers consistently reinforce prior learning, highlighting links between topics and imparting skills to aid with knowledge retrieval. Nearly all teachers have high expectations and use well-structured resources to maintain a strong pace of learning. Many teachers blend this rapid pace skilfully with empathetic support that ensures no pupil is left behind.

The school has a highly coordinated, well-embedded approach to inclusion, overseen by a team of passionate and well-trained staff, led by the additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCo). Nearly all staff at the school understand and empathise with pupils' learning differences. Across the school, staff and leaders have reassuring clarity regarding additional learning needs legislation and the school's role in supporting pupils to access their education. Helpful 'pupil profiles' underpin the co-ordinated work of staff to support pupils. These profiles include strategies for staff to employ in their regular teaching practice as well as ways pupils can support themselves. For example, using overlays or rulers to assist them when reading. Leaders evaluate the effectiveness of this provision through robust quality assurance processes, including work scrutiny, learning walks, and reports to parents. The school's support for neurodivergent pupils and those with learning differences exemplifies its nurturing ethos. It is underpinned by strong professional relationships and a consistent focus on the individual needs of pupils. This is a notable strength of the school.

A notable feature throughout the school is pupils' welcoming of challenge. They are not afraid to make mistakes on the way to excellence. Nearly all pupils demonstrate a willingness to 'get started', to attempt to solve problems or give answers, even if they are unsure of their accuracy. Most pupils display an active curiosity, asking probing questions and following their interests with tenacity. As a result, nearly all pupils are very proud of their work and its outcomes and share these enthusiastically with visitors.

Pupils recognise, and are vocal in their appreciation of, the school's nurturing environment, and how staff make learning both interesting and fun. Nearly all pupils understand and explain the importance of being kind to others and value being recognised through, for example, the 'citizen of the week' award in the primary school. Further, older primary pupils understand and explain why access to social media may be inappropriate, demonstrating a clear awareness of online safety issues. As a result, nearly all pupils feel safe at school, value the habitual kindness of staff and their peers, and feel a strong sense of inclusion and belonging at St Gerard's.

Nearly all pupils communicate clearly when speaking, including those for whom this is more difficult. They think, persevere and find the words to convey their thoughts and meaning. Many are highly skilled listeners, paying respectful and active attention to their peers, staff, and visitors, and responding with understanding and consideration. Older pupils are particularly adept at summarising information and crafting arguments orally. These highly developed communication skills are used by members of the school council in their roles as effective advocates for their peers. As a result, pupil's views consistently have a positive influence on the work of the school.

Classrooms, communal spaces and specialist areas are bright, inviting spaces that foster a purposeful learning environment and atmosphere. The use of communal areas to celebrate and display pupils' creative achievements is a notable strength of the school.

Progress in addressing recommendations from previous inspection

R1. Strengthen the provision for PSHE and careers across the school

Since the last inspection, the school has made rapid progress in strengthening this area of practice. The recently appointed co-ordinator provides effective oversight of PSHE and careers education. As a result, there is now clear, progressive development of PSHE provision throughout the school and an effective careers programme for older pupils.

The PSHE curriculum is carefully planned to allow for progression, building effectively on prior learning as well as fostering self-esteem and confidence in pupils. Curriculum themes such as relationships, living in the wider world, and health and wellbeing are interwoven and delivered to reflect the school's values. There are opportunities to explore PSHE themes outside lessons, for example, through leader and pupil led assemblies on topics including online safety, integrity and tolerance. As a result, pupils demonstrate a clear understanding of these and other important issues.

Elsewhere in the curriculum, PSHE issues are integrated and explored effectively, providing relevant context for pupils. For example, in Year 12 history, links are made to International Women's Day when considering if Genghis Khan was a feminist, and in primary drama, pupils explore the theme of empathy in 'Peter Pan'. The well-established relationships and sex education (RSE) programme provides pupils with meaningful lessons appropriate to their age. There is an effective programme of guest speakers, including a school nurse who delivers sessions on sexual health, puberty, and anxiety.

The school has introduced valuable measures in place to strengthen careers guidance throughout the senior school. Aspiration and ambition are characteristic features of this aspect of the school's work. Provision includes, for example, lessons on financial literacy and employability skills for key stage 3 pupils, and a wide range of helpful outside speakers. Extra-curricular opportunities such as the 'Business Club' support the development of pupils' skills through meaningful challenges in authentic, real-life contexts, for example, producing a radio podcast. At key stage 4, the use of proprietary packages to build CVs and explore future pathways promotes a sense of ownership and independence when considering next steps. In the sixth form, pupils benefit from bespoke, individual guidance from members of the leadership team.

R2. Improve monitoring to identify and address where there is variability in provision

Since the last inspection, the school has made significant progress against this recommendation. Several carefully considered changes have been made to the school's structures and processes, along with refinement and development of existing practice. As a result, senior and middle leaders now have a clear, accurate understanding of the quality of provision across the school and are able to plan effectively for greater consistency and improvement.

Senior leaders form a highly effective and collaborative team with a well-judged balance of duties and responsibilities. The school benefits from strong strategic and operational leadership and leaders navigate any challenges that arise with deftness, agility and energy.

The school has refined its line-management structures to allow for more effective, regular, open communication. The quality and improvement of provision is a consistent priority in staff meetings throughout the school. As a result of a well-judged balance of accountability and autonomy at all levels, staff feel highly engaged with the school and empowered to have a clear impact on improving the effectiveness of teaching.

Quality assurance processes are clear and well-established. Leaders at all levels engage in work scrutinies, learning walks and appraisal, using the outcomes of these activities effectively to inform improvement work. Middle and senior leaders act as effective critical friends to their teams, and have clear, well-evidenced insight into their work and that of the whole school. Professional learning is used effectively to support ongoing improvement work.

Processes for tracking and monitoring attainment are well-developed and highly effective. Assuring the provenance and accuracy of assessment data is an explicit and integral part of practice. As a result, leaders' analysis of progress is secure and clearly linked to reliable teacher assessment. Strong continuity of assessment and tracking between primary and secondary phases is a strength of provision and ensures that transition is seamless. As a result, rapid pupil progress is maintained in both academic and pastoral contexts.

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 Act 1998.

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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Publication date: 19/05/2025