

A report on
St Richard Gwyn R.C. High School

**Argae Lane
Barry
CF63 1BL**

Date of inspection: May 2025

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About St Richard Gwyn R.C. High School

Name of provider	St Richard Gwyn R.C. High School
Local authority	Vale of Glamorgan Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	Catholic
Number of pupils on roll	815
Pupils of statutory school age	813
Number in sixth form	N/A
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%)	15.3%
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%)	19.3%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.7%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	2.2%
Date of headteacher appointment	04/11/2019
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	22/05/2023
Start date of inspection	19/05/2025

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

St Richard Gwyn Catholic High School is a welcoming and inclusive community where the Catholic ethos strongly underpins school life. Staff are deeply committed to the school's vision of nurturing kind, successful, and resilient pupils, and they provide strong support for pupils' well-being. Many pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning, behave appropriately, and engage well in lessons. There is variation in the quality of teaching across departments. In the majority of lessons, teachers' planning ensures that pupils make suitable progress. In a few lessons, teaching is strong and, as a result of skilful planning, high expectations and probing questioning, pupils make significant progress. However, in a minority of lessons, teaching lacks the necessary challenge, structure, and responsiveness to meet pupils' needs, particularly for those with weaker skills. This results in a minority of pupils making limited progress.

Because of strengths in English teaching, many pupils demonstrate suitable reading, writing, and oracy skills but opportunities to develop beyond these lessons are underdeveloped. The school has made some progress in the development of the provision for literacy, but leadership lacks strategic planning and evaluation. The provision for developing pupils' numeracy and digital competence outside of mathematics and information technology lessons is also underdeveloped.

Pupil well-being is a notable strength of the school. Staff know pupils well, and systems to support their personal and emotional needs are effective and well-structured. The school's approach to promoting inclusion and responding to bullying is clear and largely effective. As a result, pupils report feeling safe and valued.

The provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) includes providing useful support information for teachers. However, the impact of the provision is not evaluated rigorously, and there is insufficient training for staff to enable them to plan effectively for meeting the needs of ALN pupils. Consequently, a minority of ALN pupils do not make sufficient progress.

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school rooted in Gospel values as well as focusing on supporting pupils' personal development. This vision is shared widely with the school community and underpins many aspects of the school's work. While leaders at all levels participate in self-evaluation activities and improvement planning, processes lack precision and do not focus sufficiently on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning. Strategic planning by senior leaders does not always identify or address the most pressing priorities well enough. Accountability structures across the school are underdeveloped and do not support staff to improve the quality of their work.

Professional learning opportunities are varied and engaging, and staff benefit from the school's involvement in initial teacher education. However, there is insufficient evaluation of the impact of professional learning on practice.

Recommendations

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

- R1. Improve the consistency of quality teaching across the school
- R2. Strengthen the strategic leadership of skills so that pupils have challenging and progressive opportunities to improve their literacy, numeracy and digital skills across the curriculum
- R3. Improve the planning and provision for pupils with ALN
- R4. Ensure that school improvement processes focus precisely on the impact of provision on pupils' learning and progress
- R5. Strengthen accountability at all levels

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

Many teachers at St Richard Gwyn Catholic High School foster positive working relationships with their pupils and, as a result, many pupils demonstrate a positive attitude towards learning, listen well to their teachers and show an interest in their work. They are punctual, settle quickly and behave appropriately. However, a few pupils have a negative attitude towards learning. They struggle to maintain concentration and do not complete work. In the few lessons where pupils do not conduct themselves appropriately, teachers do not have high enough expectations of their behaviour, nor do they manage it well enough.

Most teachers demonstrate strong subject knowledge. In the majority of lessons, teachers plan a range of activities to build on pupils' prior learning and use helpful resources to support their progress. Overall, there is a suitable level of challenge and pace of learning in these lessons. Teachers question pupils appropriately to check understanding before moving the learning on. Broadly, teachers use a range of suitable strategies to assess pupils' learning and provide helpful feedback, which helps them improve their work. However, there is a lack of consistency across the school, and, in a minority of cases, feedback is not precise enough to support pupils' improvement.

In a few lessons, where teaching is particularly effective, pupils make particularly strong progress. They recall prior learning confidently and apply their knowledge, skills and understanding successfully in a range of new contexts. In these lessons teachers:

- have high expectations of what pupils can achieve
- plan skilfully, focusing on what and how they want pupils to learn
- break learning down into small steps for pupils with weaker skills, move at an appropriate pace and provide the tailored support they need to make good progress
- ask a range of incisive questions that challenge pupils to develop their thinking and deepen their learning
- provide valuable opportunities for pupils to collaborate and learn together

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

- do not adapt their teaching to meet the needs of pupils with differing abilities
- do not offer enough challenge to pupils
- do not consider well enough what they want pupils to learn

- do not plan well enough to develop pupils' skills alongside their subject understanding
- do not use questioning well enough to develop pupils' thinking

Literacy

Many pupils listen attentively to their teachers and to the contributions of their peers. They respond willingly to teachers' questions and provide brief, suitable answers. In a minority of instances, the nature of teachers' questioning limits pupils' verbal responses as it does not provide them with the opportunity to provide extended answers. In general, more able pupils express themselves confidently, using relevant terminology when discussing their work together. For example, in history lessons, they consider key turning points in the civil rights movement in small groups. A few pupils are highly articulate. They take a leading role in group work, summarising and synthesising well what others have said and interact skilfully with others, explaining their opinions clearly. A few pupils do not listen well enough to each other or the teacher. They are reluctant to make oral contributions in lessons and lack confidence when presenting information.

The school has focused on developing pupils' reading skills across the curriculum over the last two years, providing teachers with relevant training. However, leaders have not evaluated the impact this has had on teaching and learning. In addition, there is limited evidence in books and lessons that strategies are embedded across the curriculum. Overall, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to develop advanced reading skills in many subjects. Most pupils locate information accurately in texts and use this to answer basic comprehension questions. Many pupils use a range of reading strategies to help them understand and analyse more challenging texts. For example, they identify relevant quotations to support their study of characters and themes in a literary text. When given the opportunity, around half of pupils make suitable inferences from the texts they read. A few pupils demonstrate advanced reading skills effectively, such as when they comment perceptively on the style and ideas in the novel, 'Heroes'. In general, pupils read aloud with suitable fluency and expression when given the opportunity to do so.

The majority of pupils generally write accurately and with a suitable structure. They punctuate well and spell subject terminology correctly. They adapt information from different sources into suitable paragraphs. Pupils generally write suitably in a variety of formats and for different audiences, for example in English lessons writing a letter to their MP about the issue of whether 16-year-olds should be allowed to vote in elections. Many more able pupils produce coherent and convincing essay plans and use historical sources effectively to create well-balanced reports. A few of them use complex vocabulary regularly and skilfully in their writing to engage and persuade the reader. Many more able pupils improve their writing well through reflection and further development. A minority of pupils make regular spelling, punctuation and grammar errors and their writing lacks

coherence, structure and sufficient content. There are good opportunities for pupils to develop their extended writing skills in a few subjects. However, overall, there are too few opportunities for pupils to write at length across the curriculum. In addition, there is not enough focus on improving pupils' technical accuracy. The school's work to improve pupils' literacy skills is not co-ordinated or evaluated well enough for it to have the greatest impact. There is also insufficient provision to support pupils with weaker literacy and numeracy skills.

Welsh

The school provides effective support to help pupils develop their Welsh language skills. Overall, pupils demonstrate a positive attitude towards learning the Welsh language and make a conscious effort to use it during lessons. Many respond to questions in full sentences, have accurate pronunciation, and use mutations competently. When given encouragement and opportunities to practise, many pupils engage well in short conversations in Welsh. A minority converse independently and well without relying heavily on vocabulary lists. Additionally, many pupils identify key details and information correctly in simple reading texts and structure their writing effectively using basic sentences.

Numeracy

In mathematics lessons, many pupils demonstrate secure numeracy skills in a range of concepts and procedures. In general, they use and apply the four rules of number confidently, and round accurately to one decimal place. They also show a good understanding of basic data handling techniques and accurately find the mode, median and range for a set of numbers. Overall, most pupils solve two-step equations involving division and subtraction appropriately. A majority of older pupils use trigonometry competently to calculate missing sides and angles in right-angled triangles.

Generally, pupils apply their numeracy skills well in a few other subjects other than mathematics. For example, in science lessons, many pupils plot graphs with reasonable accuracy and extract relevant information from these. However, overall, the school's strategic planning of numeracy across the curriculum is underdeveloped. Numeracy provision is neither mapped across subject areas nor effectively co-ordinated and evaluated. As a result, leaders do not have a firm understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the provision for the development of numeracy, nor do they take decisive action to secure necessary improvements.

Digital skills

In information technology lessons, most pupils use various software applications with increasing confidence for different purposes. For example, they analyse simple data sets

using spreadsheet tools and “Lookup” formulae, create basic algorithms in coding activities, and design simple databases to manage and interrogate information. Pupils also benefit from opportunities to learn about e-safety gaining a sound understanding of how to manage both the benefits and risks of being a digital citizen. Overall, leaders have not established a coherent or strategic approach to the development of pupils’ digital skills across the curriculum. As a result, opportunities for pupils to develop digital competence and apply this in meaningful and progressive ways are inconsistent.

Curriculum

The school offers pupils an appropriately broad and balanced curriculum that supports pupils’ academic, personal and spiritual development. Leaders have developed a clear and purposeful vision for the curriculum that draws well on the four purposes of Curriculum for Wales and reflects the school’s Catholic virtues. This vision shapes much of the school’s curriculum planning and delivery.

Subject leaders have worked collaboratively across the school, with primary school partners and with external partners to shape their schemes of learning. Staff have benefited from relevant professional learning to improve their understanding of Curriculum for Wales. However, subject leaders’ rationale for choosing the content and the sequence of their specific curriculum is not always clear. As a result, the quality and suitability of curriculum content in different subject areas are too variable.

Older pupils access a wide range of GCSE and vocational option choices. They receive useful guidance to help them make informed decisions. Pupils benefit from a suitable programme of careers guidance and work-related learning.

The curriculum supports pupils’ creative, physical, and artistic development well. In addition, pupils develop valuable employability skills and independence through bespoke skills lessons in Key Stage 3, which prepare them suitably for the Skills Challenge Certificate in Key Stage 4.

The personal and social education (PSE) curriculum is well structured at Key Stage 3, and responds appropriately to pupils’ needs, informed by relevant well-being information and pupil voice. The PSE programme helps pupils to develop a secure understanding of important societal themes such as an awareness of diversity. In addition, it supports pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding in order to make healthy lifestyle choices. Pupils also benefit from a suitable relationships and sexuality education programme.

The school places a strong emphasis on the development of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. This aspect of their work is delivered explicitly through religious education lessons and permeates through all aspects of school life.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of activities that further enrich their learning experiences. These include trips to Llangrannog and Paris as well as an extensive range of clubs such as weightlifting, chess and subject revision sessions.

Well-being, care, support and guidance

Leaders and staff at St Richard Gwyn Catholic High School place a high value on nurturing kind, successful and resilient pupils who are proud of their Catholic values. Staff embrace these values strongly and their care for pupils' well-being across the school is a notable strength. There is a wide range of lunchtime and after-school clubs available that support pupils' spiritual, emotional and social well-being effectively, such as the CAFOD club, debate club, rock band and athletics clubs.

Progress leaders know their pupils well and the team regularly shares information regarding pupil achievement as well as any concerns about individuals or groups with all staff. The school has a well-understood behaviour and rewards system. However, this is not implemented consistently enough across the school. The school has a clear strategy to respond to any bullying. Most pupils say that the school deals suitably with incidents of bullying. Staff provide tailored programmes of support for individuals to help them to understand and address any inappropriate behaviours. As a result of effective support systems, most pupils feel safe in school and know whom to turn to if they have a concern.

The Progress Centre is a valuable well-being resource base that offers varied and suitable interventions to support pupils. Staff use robust systems to identify the specific needs of individual pupils and put in place appropriate interventions. These include beneficial emotional literacy support programmes and support from outside organisations such as the Cardiff City Foundation.

Pupils develop valuable leadership skills through their membership of the Chaplaincy Team. The school has also recently restructured its 'pupil parliament' to include three sub-committees. This is beginning to offer meaningful leadership opportunities to pupils. For example, the ethos committee organises an annual 'culture day' that celebrates the diverse range of backgrounds across the school. There is effective support available to help pupils with the application process and leaders focus on inclusivity, ensuring that all pupil groups are represented. However, the work of the pupil parliament is not widely understood by pupils across the school. As part of its drive to reduce the impact of poverty and support pupils' well-being, staff and pupils have collaborated and recently introduced a prom shop and subsidised school visits and trips.

The majority of pupils feel that the school listens to their views and makes changes as a result. This is demonstrated through the 'you said, we listened' posters displayed around

the school. For example, the school has introduced a uniform bank in response to pupil voice.

The school complies with the Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act. Teachers are provided with relevant information about pupils with ALN. This includes one-page pupil profiles, suggested support strategies, and 'class on a page' overview sheets. In addition to this, at the start of the academic year, the additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCO) shares helpful information with staff about pupils. Where teaching assistants are directed effectively by the class teacher, they provide valuable support to pupils with ALN. However, there is insufficient whole-school professional learning for staff on how to support pupils with ALN in their lessons.

The progress of pupils with ALN and the impact of the support they receive is not monitored and evaluated effectively. Teachers do not take the needs of these pupils into account well enough when they plan their lessons. As a result, a minority of pupils with ALN make limited progress.

The school uses a range of appropriate strategies to promote good attendance and implements a suitable graduated response to pupils whose attendance causes concern. The school made particularly good progress in improving attendance during the 2023-2024 academic year. Whole-school attendance compares well with that in similar schools, although it remains below pre-pandemic levels. The attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals has also improved and the rate of persistent absence has reduced. The rate of improvement has slowed in 2024-2025. As a result, the school has introduced further strategies to target pupils whose attendance is of most concern.

The school has appropriate systems in place to safeguard pupils. Leaders encourage pupils and staff to report all concerns using a range of methods. These include a helpful self-referral system for pupils.

Leading and improving

The headteacher has a clear vision based on the themes of developing success, building resilience and living Gospel values. He shares his vision successfully across the school and places a strong focus on care and support for his staff and pupils. Leaders support the headteacher's vision well to ensure a strong Catholic ethos across the whole school community.

There are regular and appropriate opportunities for leaders and teachers to consider key aspects of their work with their line managers. Staff are also encouraged to reflect suitably on their practice through the professional development review activity. However, overall accountability processes lack rigour and do not effectively support the development of staff within their roles or focus on the impact of their work.

There is a wide range of engaging professional learning including appropriate opportunities for staff to develop their teaching and leadership skills. These include sharing of best practice as well as participation in leadership pathways and working groups such as the teaching forum. The impact of these professional learning opportunities has not been fully evaluated. St Richard Gwyn is a lead school for Initial Teacher Education and, as a result, staff in the school benefit from their links to higher education and research strategies.

Senior leaders use a detailed analysis of outcome data as well as suitable tracking and target setting processes to inform their views of pupil progress. They carry out regular monitoring activities, including joint work scrutiny and informal learning walks, across the academic year. Leaders at all levels are involved in these self-evaluation processes. In the main, leaders use these activities to check for compliance with school approaches. However, these monitoring activities do not focus well enough on the quality of teaching or its impact on pupil progress. The evaluation of well-being aspects, such as the work of the pastoral teams, is underdeveloped.

The link between leaders' self-evaluation findings and the school's broad strategic priorities is not strong enough. Leaders do not identify precisely the most important aspects to improve, or plan securely for improvement. Although they build in regular opportunities to review their priorities, they do not evaluate the impact of their work well enough. Despite these shortcomings, in a few instances, leaders have overseen emerging improvements, for example in national priorities such as the provision for reading and developing pupils' Welsh language skills. However, self-evaluation and improvement planning has not had sufficient impact in important aspects such as improving the quality of teaching, the provision for pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum and support for pupils with ALN.

The business manager and headteacher manage the budget and monitor spending carefully. Governors oversee this process suitably. However, the school's current budget is in deficit. The school makes appropriate use of grant funding, including the pupil development grant, and monitors appropriately. The school's poverty strategy is focused beneficially on supporting the well-being and attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals to enable them to develop the skills to lead fulfilling lives.

Governors are passionate supporters of the school and demonstrate a generally secure understanding of its work. They provide appropriate and helpful challenge, particularly in relation to financial management, health and safety, and the operational planning associated with the new school building.

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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