

A report on

St David's College

**Llandudno
Conwy
LL30 1RD**

Date of inspection: September 2025

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About St David's College

Name of provider	St David's College
Proprietor status	Private limited company with charitable status
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent
Residential provision?	No
Number of pupils on roll	257
Pupils of statutory school age	180
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	23/01/2025
Start date of inspection	29/09/2025

School context:

St David's College is an independent co-educational day and boarding school that educates pupils from the age of 9 to 19 years. The school is located just south of Llandudno in North Wales.

The school opened in 1965, as an educational charity established by Trust Deed, to provide secondary education within a Christian framework. The school's mission is to 'develop the whole person through a broad education founded on Christian principles, a wide choice of interest and activity, and an achievable personal programme for each pupil'.

There are currently 257 pupils on roll of whom 73 are boarders and 77 are in the sixth form. Around a fifth of pupils have an individual development plan (IDP) or an education, health and care plan (EHCP). The school is registered with Welsh Government to educate pupils with autism spectrum condition (ASC), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and specific learning difficulties (SpLD).

The current headteacher took up their post in October 2017.

The last monitoring inspection was in November 2023, and the school received a focused inspection in January 2025.

Summary

Pupils feel respected and valued at St David's College. Staff develop strong, positive relationships with pupils, which supports the school's family ethos. Pupils are polite, respectful, and communicate confidently with peers, teachers and visitors. Across the school, they demonstrate good social skills and work supportively with others. Pupils contribute positively to school life through the school council.

Pupils make secure progress in their learning at all stages. In the primary phase, they listen attentively, engage imaginatively with stories, and begin to make predictions and connections. Their writing develops through extended tasks, such as recounts of historical visits. Mathematical skills are suitably developed and pupils participate enthusiastically in physical activities, building coordination and teamwork.

In Key Stage 3, pupils extend their subject knowledge through discussion, questioning and practical tasks, while oracy, particularly in modern languages, is a strength. By Key Stage 4, pupils write increasingly independently and with accuracy, respond thoughtfully to literature, and apply critical thinking skills, such as analysing historical sources. Mathematical understanding is broadly secure, with more able pupils showing strong algebraic reasoning. In the sixth form, learners demonstrate greater mastery of subjects, develop extended writing and critical reading, and apply their skills across the curriculum.

The curriculum is broad and balanced, with innovative provision such as outdoor education and animal management. Teaching is mainly strong, characterised by high expectations and positive learning environments, though feedback to pupils is inconsistent in quality. A wide range of interventions support individual learning needs well.

Leaders and governors are committed to the school's growth, but quality assurance and self-evaluation lack rigour. Safeguarding practices have been strengthened through improved processes, broader staffing and stronger external collaboration.

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) 2024, required to maintain its registration.

Main evaluation

St David's College is a nurturing community where pupils feel safe and respected. Teaching and support staff develop positive and respectful relationships with pupils, which helps foster the strong family ethos of the school.

Pupils demonstrate strong social skills, working well with their peers, communicating politely, and both seeking and offering help appropriately. They are welcoming and respectful towards visitors to the school.

Pupil Progress

Primary

Nearly all pupils of primary age listen attentively and respond accurately to questions. For example, when connecting the story of Boudicca to their prior knowledge of this historical period and the story of Gwenllïan. Further, these pupils demonstrate the early stages of being able to make predictions and connections. They can predict what may happen next in the story based on their imagination and knowledge.

Pupils' work in subjects such as English, history and art shows evidence of accurate extended writing, for example, when writing a recount of a visit to a local castle. This work supports the development of subject knowledge and skills in these curriculum areas.

Specialist one to one sessions focus on phonics and word construction and ensure that pupils have a strong foundation in their spelling and decoding of unfamiliar words. Targeted speech and language sessions help pupils verbalise cause-and-effect relationships, strengthening their explanatory and reasoning skills.

Pupils' mathematical skills are developing suitably, with a focus on number work. For example, pupils in Year 6 can round numbers to the nearest 100, 1000, 10,000 accurately.

In their physical education lessons, nearly all pupils develop their co-ordination skills well. They also develop their ability to work in a team environment and gain an appreciation of the benefits of physical activity.

Secondary

In Key Stage 3, many pupils ask and answer questions with confidence and listen and respond well to teachers and their peers. As a result of effective communicating, sharing views and opinions, they deepen their understanding and subject knowledge. Nearly all pupils develop their oracy well, for example in Spanish, pupils build from using basic words to short sentences with confidence.

Nearly all pupils across the full range of abilities, participate enthusiastically in physical education classes. Where appropriate, pupils have individualised learning targets to support their engagement and acquisition of skills in team sports. In design and technology, Year 8 pupils develop dexterity skills through the cutting and filing of aluminium in preparation for making a candle holder. Pupils' development of physical skills is a strength of the school.

At Key Stage 4, pupils further develop their oracy skills through groupwork and discussion. For example, in identifying symbolism and context within a Shakespearian play. Most pupils demonstrate the ability to write for multiple purposes across the curriculum. In English lessons, nearly all pupils write for a range of purposes, from annotating a poem to highlight the key features of the text, to extended story writing. More able pupils provide expansive responses, and pupils with developing literacy skills engage with enthusiasm when writing extended stories. As a result of their perseverance, pupils write with increasing independence and accuracy over time.

Pupils develop their thinking skills appropriately across a range of subjects. Pupils demonstrate practical source analysis, for example, by interpreting a cartoon on the 'scramble for Africa' identifying provenance and questioning reliability. In specialist one-to-one sessions, pupils strengthen their organisational and higher-order thinking skills. With support, these pupils are able to plan and structure extended essays. Many of these pupils engage well in structured conversation tasks.

Pupils across the senior school generally demonstrate sound procedural skills in mathematics, with accuracy varying among individuals in line with their ability. More able pupils demonstrate a strong fundamental understanding of algebra and confidently explain their reasoning, enabling them to solve increasingly complex problems. Pupils use precise mathematical vocabulary, such as quadratics and linear equations appropriately to support their conceptual understanding and visual representation of algebraic ideas.

Post-16

In the Sixth Form, most pupils demonstrate increasing mastery of subject areas including academic literacy for examinations and the ability to apply learning to different contexts. Pupils demonstrate deepened understanding through extended writing, critical reading, analysis, editing and redrafting. In English as an additional language sessions, pupils learn how to differentiate between formal and informal language.

Most pupils articulate their mathematical calculations in logical steps, strengthening their mathematical reasoning and applying these skills effectively in other subjects such as physics.

In addition, older pupils working towards their sports coaching qualification support younger pupils to develop their physical skills whilst developing their own leadership skills.

Pupil Well-being

Pupils influence the work of the school through the school council and class representative system. Many pupils value the opportunity to effect change at the school, for example, broadening the range of available sports in the activities session to include archery. Many pupils are confident in the processes for bringing about change in the school.

The school has recently amended its approach to managing pupil behaviour. Leaders have provided training to teaching staff on the impact of trauma and their vision for positive behaviour support. This change has been very recently implemented, and it is too soon to evaluate its impact.

The school provides a broad range of support and interventions to meet the needs of pupils. This includes school nurses, counselling support, an additional learning needs (ALN) team, specialist teachers, speech and language therapy and occupational therapy. These staff collaborate effectively. They develop a thorough understanding of pupils' individual needs and use this to plan relevant interventions. For example, pupils are supported to improve their spelling, speech and language skills, organisational and motor skills. These staff regularly review the progress of pupils in these targeted areas and use this information to plan their next steps.

Since the time of the focused visit in January 2025, leaders have taken a range of suitable actions to strengthen safeguarding practices at the school. The safeguarding team has been broadened to include more staff from key areas of the school, including boarding and medical staff. Safeguarding concerns are recorded accurately and responded to in a timely manner by this team.

In addition, safeguarding leads have made sound progress towards the targets in their action plan, making improvements in important areas of safeguarding. For example, the school now evaluates staff understanding of training, has strengthened the support and challenge from the nominated safeguarding governor, and there are regular meetings between the wider safeguarding team to discuss recent trends and needs. The safeguarding team uses the information gathered through these processes to inform the provision of useful training for staff, pupils and parents.

The safeguarding team are beginning to work collaboratively with partners, such as the local safeguarding board, placing authorities and health boards to evaluate and

strengthen practice at the school. For example, they have accessed beneficial professional learning in important areas such as radicalisation.

Curriculum

St David's College offers a broad and balanced curriculum. The range of options at Level 2 and Level 3 are varied, including functional skills in mathematics, performing arts, animal management and learning in the outdoors. The optional subjects available to pupils each year vary depending upon the needs of each cohort.

Spotlight 1: Learning in the outdoors

Pupils across the school enjoy and value highly their participation in the school's outdoor education programme, which includes activities such as mountain walking, kayaking, bush-craft and sailing. Pupils develop strong resilience, determination and confidence through participating in this innovative curricular area. They strengthen their communication and teamwork skills successfully and speak of the spiritual experience of being in the physical environment. Pupils recognise the benefits of these activities pushing them out of their comfort zones. Having started outdoor education in Year 5, the programme culminates in an expedition in Year 10. This expedition may take place within the UK or beyond e.g. ice climbing in Norway or trekking in Morocco. Expeditions are pupil led and prepare pupils for the challenges of adult life.

Spotlight 2: Animal husbandry

A further innovative feature of the curriculum is the animal management course offered at Level 3. This provision has responded to a specific desire from pupils to complete a science-based course with an animal focus. The well-equipped animal husbandry department also supports the teaching of BTEC applied science at Level 2 and pupil activity sessions that are offered from Year 5 throughout the school. These opportunities support pupils' well-being as well as providing an opportunity to develop their academic studies further.

The impact of teaching

Across the school all staff have extremely positive working relationships with pupils and know their learning and social and emotional needs well. In nearly all lessons teachers create a calm and safe learning environment, for example, by the use of music or the setting of class rules before discussing a sensitive issue. High expectations and strong class management ensure pupils are respectful of each other and exhibit positive attitudes towards their learning. Teachers exhibit strong subject knowledge. This allows them to respond well to pupil questioning and enables them to support pupils in developing a deeper understanding. Teaching staff respond sensitively to misconceptions and work

with the pupil to correct these. In the one to one lessons with specialist support teachers, staff are particularly adept at responding to the needs of the individual and ensuring progress is made from the pupil's starting point.

Where teaching has the greatest impact on learning, many teachers plan effectively to ensure activities are interesting and build upon each other. For example, using a board game to develop younger pupils' understanding of rounding up numbers or developing innovative approaches based on research, to develop pupils' skill levels in PE. Many teachers, particularly when teaching older pupils, use open questions effectively to extend and confirm pupil understanding. Many teachers successfully model the outcomes they expect from pupils, for example, within a DT lesson when making a product from aluminium, or in history or English, when modelling responses to examination questions.

In the few lessons where teaching is less effective there are lower levels of pupil engagement. In these lessons, activities are not adapted to the needs of the individual pupil well enough. Additionally, in a few lessons, teachers do not closely monitor pupils' activities and so do not always correct mistakes or inaccuracies in the moment.

Overall, the quality of feedback to pupils, is too variable. In a few subjects, teacher feedback is very detailed providing pupils with clear guidance for their next steps in learning. However, too often feedback from teachers is too descriptive and does not assist pupils in taking their learning forward.

Leading and Improving

Leaders at all levels of the school are committed to supporting the ethos of St David's College. They work hard to support the vision of the school to become the '*best little boarding school in Wales*'. Leaders across the school know the pupils and their individual interests and needs well.

Leadership capacity has recently been enhanced at senior level through the additional appointment of an assistant head with responsibility for boarding provision. It is too early to evaluate the impact of this restructure.

Professional working relationships between the school, parents and carers are strong. Parents and carers value the school's strong focus on empathy, self-respect, respect for others and developing pupils' skills in leadership and resilience.

Teachers engage in useful professional learning to enhance their knowledge of how to support pupils with additional learning needs. For example, teaching staff can achieve qualifications in dyslexia and/or dyscalculia. Recent whole-school training has focused on appropriate areas, such as developing a trauma informed approach. However, there is a

lack of robust oversight of how professional development, including for support staff, links to school priorities.

The school's arrangements to manage the performance of staff are underdeveloped and do not link effectively to whole school priorities. Performance management targets rarely focus upon pupil progress and lack specific and measurable success criteria.

The school's processes for quality assurance lack rigour. As a result, the school has an incomplete view of pupil progress and an inaccurate understanding of the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024. Areas for development arising from self-evaluation are not identified specifically or precisely enough to form the basis of effective school improvement planning, at departmental and whole-school level. Further, systems and processes in the school do not support leaders to effectively evaluate important areas of compliance and self-evaluation. The school's progress against recommendations left in the core inspection of 2019 has been limited.

The governing body is dedicated and committed to supporting the continued development and growth of the school. The safeguarding governor works closely with the designated safeguarding person to provide supportive challenge and act as a critical friend. Governors have a good understanding of the school's staffing and financial issues.

However, their understanding of the quality of teaching and learning, pupil progress and their statutory duties, is not as secure. Although governors are very supportive of the school and the headteacher, they have not provided a robust enough challenge to the senior leadership team in these key areas.

A few issues were raised with the school leadership during the inspection relating to the strengthening of policy to reflect changes to Welsh legislation. This work was completed suitably. On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024.

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.

Safeguarding

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils gives no cause for concern.

Recommendations

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

- R1. Improve the rigour and quality of self-evaluation processes at all levels to ensure effective school improvement
- R2. Strengthen governance to provide challenge and support of school 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.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from parent/carers 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

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