

A report on

St Joseph's R.C.High School

**Pencarn Way
Tredegar Park
NP10 8XH**

Date of inspection: March 2026

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About St Joseph's R.C.High School

Name of provider	St Joseph's R.C.High School
Local authority	Newport City Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	English medium
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	Roman Catholic
Number of pupils on roll	1457
Pupils of statutory school age	1198
Number in sixth form	259
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 20.3%)	12.5%
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 9.0%)	3.0%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	21.8%
Lead partner for Initial teacher education	Yes
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2025

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Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	05/03/2018
Start date of inspection	02/03/2026

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 Joseph's Roman Catholic High School provides a caring and supportive environment where many pupils, including those with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), develop their knowledge and confidence well. Positive working relationships between staff and pupils are a strong feature of the school. In most lessons, teachers know their pupils well and create calm and purposeful learning environments where pupils feel respected and willing to take part in learning. As a result, most pupils settle quickly to their work and many listen carefully and contribute thoughtfully to discussions. Many teachers explain ideas clearly and provide useful guidance and this means that many pupils make at least expected progress in their lessons. In a few lessons, highly engaging teaching leads to particularly strong progress because teachers use challenging questions and carefully planned activities that engage pupils effectively in their learning. In a few instances, activities do not challenge pupils well enough, or questioning does not extend their thinking sufficiently.

The school has a vibrant school library to help promote reading for pleasure. However, across the curriculum, pupils are mainly given opportunities to locate and retrieve information from texts. As a result, pupils do not use their advanced reading skills across the curriculum well enough to support their learning. The majority of pupils structure their extended writing logically and use a suitable range of vocabulary when expressing their ideas. However, a minority of pupils make careless errors in their written work. Leaders have started to map opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy skills across relevant subjects. However, the extent to which planning secures progressively challenging opportunities for pupils to use and apply their numeracy skills is limited. Pupils develop creative and practical skills well, for example when composing music or creating artwork. Across the curriculum, worthwhile opportunities for pupils to strengthen their advanced reading, numeracy and digital skills are at an early stage.

The headteacher is a compassionate and ambitious leader who places pupils' well-being and progress at the heart of the school's work. Together with her senior leaders, they demonstrate a strong commitment to providing pupils with the best start in life. Leaders have made sustained progress in important areas such as attendance, well-being, and pupil outcomes. The school has a clear framework for self-evaluation, but evaluations tend to rely too heavily on summative data, leading to overly generous judgements, at times. As a result, improvement planning lacks precision as evaluation activities do not always focus closely enough on the impact of teaching on pupil progress. Professional learning is strategically planned but the impact of these opportunities is not evaluated robustly.

The school is a welcoming community with many strengths in teaching, pupil support, leadership and opportunities beyond the classroom. Pupils benefit from a broad

curriculum that includes a range of subjects as well as valuable extra-curricular activities and educational visits. These features help many pupils feel safe, supported and motivated to succeed in their learning.

Recommendations

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

- R1 Refine self-evaluation processes so that leaders focus robustly on the impact of teaching on pupils' progress and plan precisely for improvement.
- R2 Improve the planning of the provision for the progressive development of pupils' advanced reading, numeracy and digital skills.

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

Main findings

Teaching and learning

In many lessons, pupils, including those with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), make at least suitable progress in developing their subject knowledge and skills. In a few of these lessons, inspirational teaching results in rapid progress.

In most instances, teachers demonstrate strong subject knowledge and offer pupils a good language model. In many cases, teachers support pupils' acquisition of subject-specific and general vocabulary effectively. These teachers know their pupils well and foster positive working relationships with them. As a result, classrooms are orderly and purposeful. Most pupils settle quickly to their work, participate willingly in activities and engage courteously with their teachers and peers. Many listen respectfully to their teachers and to one another and are eager to express their ideas and contribute to discussions.

In many cases, teachers plan their lessons carefully to ensure a clear and logical structure. Lessons often begin with a purposeful activity that helps establish a focused start to learning. Teachers generally maintain an appropriate pace of learning as the lesson develops. They provide clear explanations of key ideas and respond appropriately to pupils' questions. They offer suitable levels of challenge and model concepts or examples of good work to support pupils' understanding.

In many lessons, teachers circulate effectively, offering support and providing live feedback that helps pupils improve their work. They use high quality resources and technology effectively to support learning and check pupils' understanding regularly. They deploy teaching assistants appropriately to support specific pupils. In many lessons, teachers use questioning suitably to check pupils' recall and, in a majority of cases, they develop pupils' understanding further by encouraging them to elaborate on their ideas.

In a few instances, teachers bring passion and energy to their lessons. They plan learning meticulously to create highly engaging experiences and use probing questions that involve all pupils. They provide very high levels of challenge while ensuring learning remains accessible. They check pupils' understanding consistently to address misconceptions and extend pupils' thinking. In these lessons, pupils are highly engaged and make particularly strong progress.

In a few lessons, shortcomings in teaching limit the depth of pupils' learning. In these instances, planning relies too heavily on low-level or repetitive activities, learning intentions are unclear and questioning does not develop pupils' thinking well enough. As a result, pupils become passive and do not sustain their concentration throughout the

lesson. Occasionally, this leads to low-level disruption. A very few pupils arrive late to lessons, and a few pupils do not take sufficient pride in the presentation of their work.

The quality of written feedback is variable. In the majority of cases, pupils receive useful diagnostic feedback that helps them understand how to improve their work, and teachers provide beneficial opportunities for them to respond to this feedback. However, in a minority of cases, feedback is limited or overly positive, consisting mainly of praise without clear guidance on how pupils can improve.

Literacy

Many pupils listen attentively to their teachers making helpful contributions to classroom discussions. They use a suitable range of vocabulary to share their views. In a few instances, pupils use sophisticated vocabulary and provide detailed responses to their teachers' questions. For example, when they discuss the effects of different word classes in poetry by Owen Sheers. A minority of pupils do not listen well enough and provide brief and underdeveloped responses to teachers' questions. Many teachers help pupils to develop their responses, for example when they model the use of subject terminology suitably.

The majority of pupils paragraph their work correctly and structure their writing logically. They vary their sentence structures suitably to help engage their reader. They use an appropriate range of vocabulary to show an awareness of different audiences and purposes, for example in religious education when they discuss whether Jesus was merely an earthly leader. A minority of pupils do not proof-read their work well enough and make basic errors in their use of capital letters and apostrophes. In a few cases, poorly structured worksheets mean that pupils provide brief written responses.

Leaders have started to plan opportunities to support pupils' reading, writing and oracy skills across the curriculum. However, they do not consider well enough how these support learning in different subjects or whether they offer the appropriate level of challenge.

Enhanced Focus on Reading

Staff at St Joseph's recognise the importance of improving pupils' reading skills to support them in becoming valued and active members of society. The school has a vibrant library and provides timetabled opportunities for pupils to visit during English lessons, and some pupils make use of it during break and lunchtimes. Although leaders are beginning to plan suitable activities to support and develop pupils' reading across the curriculum, these are at an early stage of development.

The majority of pupils say that they enjoy reading and are encouraged to read in subjects other than English. Many pupils have secure basic reading skills and can extract relevant information successfully from a range of texts. The majority of pupils are able to summarise information from a range of texts suitably, for example, in religious education when reading about why Mary is a role model for humanity. When reading in English lessons, the majority of pupils use their advanced reading skills well. These pupils apply their inference and deduction skills successfully and have useful opportunities to compare and synthesise a range of texts. They identify and explore a range of textual details to justify the points they make. However, across the curriculum, pupils are mainly given opportunities to locate and retrieve information from texts. Although they complete a range of these reading comprehension exercises, they do not help pupils develop more than a superficial understanding of the texts they read. As a result, pupils do not use their advanced reading skills across the curriculum well enough to support their learning.

The school works suitably with their partner schools to support year 7 pupils who come into the school with weak reading skills. They use and share information from reading tests to support their understanding of pupils' needs and plan interventions suitably. The school is beginning to use this data to inform professional learning for reading. However, leaders do not always consider other forms of evidence to support their understanding of pupils' needs for reading well enough. This hinders leaders' ability to plan for further improvement in important areas of reading.

Cymraeg

In general, pupils display a positive attitude towards learning the Welsh language and many are developing their speaking skills well. They pronounce Welsh words appropriately and translate basic phrases from Welsh to English accurately. When studying Welsh poetry, a majority of pupils identify basic poetic techniques accurately and demonstrate a good understanding of literary texts. The majority of pupils produce short pieces of writing in Welsh using a suitable range of vocabulary. A few construct more complex responses and understand well how to communicate in a variety of tenses. A minority of pupils lack confidence when communicating in Welsh and offer limited responses during small group and whole class discussions. These pupils rely too much on support such as sentence builders and word banks when speaking and writing.

The school provides suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their knowledge of the Welsh language and culture outside of Welsh lessons, for example through the residential visits to Llangrannog, Patagonia and a school Eisteddfod. The 'Cyngor Cymraeg' raise awareness of Welsh language and culture during celebration evenings and fundraising events for the 2027 Urdd Eisteddfod in Newport.

Numeracy

Many pupils demonstrate sound numeracy skills. When given the opportunity, they apply these appropriately in authentic contexts across the curriculum. In mathematics lessons, many pupils demonstrate a sound understanding of the four rules of number. These pupils can add and subtract fractions with different denominators and calculate a percentage change using the multiplier method efficiently. Generally, pupils develop their understanding of algebra suitably when, for example, they substitute positive integers into word formulae. Many pupils can work out the perimeter and area of compound areas appropriately and a majority develop their knowledge of time zones and solve multi-stage problems in context using an appropriate method. More able pupils demonstrate a secure understanding of number and transfer their knowledge and skills adeptly when, for example, forming and solving algebraic equations.

A minority of pupils have weaker numeracy skills. They struggle to recall and apply the four rules of number in different contexts, such as simplifying algebraic expressions with positive and negative terms. When applying their skills in relevant subjects, they do not work out the scale on an axis independently or substitute into formulae accurately.

A minority of pupils do not organise their workings out clearly enough which limits their ability to identify their errors independently. In a few instances within mathematics and across the curriculum, pupils are not taught to develop their conceptual understanding well enough. For example, they rely on 'tricks' when multiplying fractions or formula triangles when calculating density in science. This limits their ability to recall and build upon prior learning well enough.

Leaders have started to map opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy skills across relevant subjects. For example, pupils have opportunities to interpret climate graphs in geography and they calculate the mean of a data set in science. However, overall, the extent to which planning secures progressively challenging opportunities for pupils to use and apply their numeracy skills within mathematics and across the curriculum remains limited.

Digital

The school's planning to develop pupils' digital skills across the curriculum is in its early stages. Many areas of learning offer pupils' suitable low-level activities to develop these skills. In a very few instances, for example in music, pupils develop their ability to use more advanced aspects of software when creating digital compositions. However, in general, they do not practise or develop the advanced skills they learn in computer science lessons in other subjects.

Wider skills

Generally, pupils develop their physical skills suitably and there is a high level of participation and engagement during games lessons. They also develop their fine motor skills beneficially during practical lessons. Pupils develop their creative skills well, for example when creating jazz pieces in music and designing masks in art.

Sixth Form

Nearly all pupils in the sixth form have a positive attitude to their studies. They contribute willingly to class discussions and demonstrate enthusiasm for learning. Most respond well to the challenge of dealing with more complex subject concepts. They relate well to each other and show respect for their peers' views. Many pupils in the sixth form make at least expected progress in lessons. The school provides helpful intervention support to pupils in the sixth form, for example mentoring and exam technique workshops.

Pupils in the sixth form play an active role in the life of the school, for example leading school assemblies and offering support and guidance to younger pupils. Pupils benefit from worthwhile careers guidance to help support their transition to the next steps in their education. For example, the school delivers sessions on UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) applications, apprenticeships and careers.

Curriculum

The school provides a suitably broad and balanced curriculum, underpinned by its ethos of 'Serving God Through Learning Together'. Staff have worked with a range of stakeholders and established a clear vision for their curriculum which is rooted in ensuring pupils develop their knowledge and understanding over time. The school provides beneficial extra-curricular activities and visits that enrich the curriculum. For example, pupils participate in local visits to St. Fagans as well as trips to New York and Berlin.

Pupils benefit from a range of opportunities to support their spiritual, moral and social understanding and their personal development within the Catholic faith. However, the provision to study other religious and non-religious views in depth is in the early stages of development. The school's personal, social and health education (PSE) programme is coordinated well and is responsive to pupils' needs. There are beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop an understanding of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people. For example, in history pupils learn about the Black Tudors and their experiences during that time. In addition, to support pupils' understanding of the wider world, the school holds a range of events to celebrate different cultures, for example, an evening that supported pupils to develop their understanding of Polish tradition and culture. However, planning for other aspects of diversity, such as LGBTQ+ people is at an early stage of development.

For older pupils, the school provides a suitable range of courses that enables them to follow their chosen pathway. These include retail business and engineering. There are useful links with partner secondary schools to enhance the breadth and balance of the sixth form curriculum. Pupils benefit from a range of impartial advice that helps them to make informed decisions about their future choices.

Well-being, care, support and guidance

St Joseph's Catholic School is a caring and inclusive community, underpinned by a strong culture of kindness and respect. Pupils benefit from a whole school approach to well-being, which includes helpful PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) sessions, that actively supports their mental health and emotional development. There is a broad range of additional support provided for pupils, including learning coaches, well-being coaches and safe spaces, such as the library. As a result, most pupils say they know who or where to go to if they have any concerns.

The school has a clear graduated response to support pupils to make positive choices about their behaviour, including a range of rewards. Useful mechanisms to support behaviour, such as internal reflection and relational approaches help to promote a calm learning environment. As a result of this work, there are very few cases of poor behaviour across the school. In addition, the school supports pupils to foster a strong sense of respect.

Pupil leadership activities have a positive impact on provision and pupil well-being. Pupils' views are sought and acted upon, and many pupils feel their voice is valued. Leaders frequently meet pupils to discuss school improvement priorities and aspects of teaching and learning, such as evaluating the effectiveness of teacher feedback. Pupils provide worthwhile academic mentoring in a range of subjects and lead some extra-curricular activities. The 'Senedd and its Ministries', learner task and finish groups, along with the 'Friends in Faith' group have had a positive impact on pupils' experiences, although not all groups of pupils are represented on the student bodies.

The provision for vulnerable pupils and those pupils with ALN (Additional Learning Needs) is centred around 'The Inclusion Room' which is a supportive and purposeful space. This provides a valuable and nurturing environment where pupils can access both academic and emotional interventions, through 'Thrive Hive'. During their literacy and numeracy interventions, a majority of pupils with ALN can recall prior learning and acquire new learning suitably. Most teaching assistants make a valuable contribution in supporting vulnerable pupils and those with ALN in their lessons.

The members of the ALN team have a clear understanding of their roles and they promote an inclusive ethos, actively seeking to remove barriers to learning. They have developed a

strong person-centred approach and created a helpful online platform containing valuable information for colleagues. They work collaboratively with pupils and parents to produce appropriate Individual Development Plans (IDPs) along with useful one-page profiles. These provide helpful guidance for staff on how best to support pupils' learning. However, leaders do not evaluate closely enough the impact or how well these teaching strategies are adapted across the curriculum to meet the needs of pupils with ALN.

The ALN team are passionate about providing the best experiences for pupils with ALN and enabling them to fulfil their potential. They work effectively with pupils, parents and external agencies to meet pupils' needs. Pupils with ALN in year 7, reflect positively on a well-planned transition programme, 'Ready, Steady, Transition'. In addition, there are enhanced transition programmes, in conjunction with Careers Wales, for those pupils with ALN who move on to education, employment and training. These pupils feel safe and listened to and both pupils and parents value the care they receive from staff. The positive relationships between staff and pupils are a notable strength.

The ALN team identifies pupils' needs promptly using comprehensive assessments. With the support of a well-led and well-resourced ALN team, many pupils with ALN develop more independent attitudes to learning. As a result, many pupils with ALN make at least suitable progress in the development of their knowledge and understanding. However, teachers do not always use the information provided for them well enough in planning their provision and feedback does not always help pupils with ALN understand how to improve their work.

The school promotes positive attendance well and demonstrates a strong commitment to improving this aspect of its work. Targets are communicated clearly and expectations are understood well by pupils, parents and staff. There are robust tracking and monitoring procedures that enable leaders and form tutors to work closely with the school's attendance and local authority officers to address barriers to attendance. Overall, attendance, including that of pupils eligible for free school meals, has been consistently above that of similar schools and unverified data for 2025-2026 indicates that there has been a further increase in attendance. In addition, rates of persistent absence have remained below the national average and well below those of similar schools.

The school maintains a strong safeguarding culture with clear expectations understood by staff, visitors and pupils. Staff have a suitable understanding of how to raise any concerns. Staff and governors receive regular safeguarding training delivered by school leaders as well as enhanced external training for specific pastoral staff and senior leaders. School and Local Authority safer recruitment processes are followed appropriately and clear, thorough records are kept. Leaders make referrals to outside agencies when necessary and follow up appropriately. The school has well understood processes for dealing with the very few incidents of bullying and most pupils feel that any issues they raise are

addressed promptly. Overall, as a result of these processes, most pupils feel safe, supported and know who to approach if they need help.

Leading and improving

In the relatively short time since she was appointed, the headteacher has shown herself to be a compassionate and ambitious leader who places pupils' well-being and progress at the heart of the school's work. Together with her senior leaders, they demonstrate a strong commitment to providing pupils with the best start in life. They ensure that faith is the foundation of all they do so that Gospel values and Catholic virtues permeate and affect all aspects of school life.

Leadership has secured strong improvements in many aspects of the school's work, including pupils' attendance, well-being and outcomes at the end of Years 11 and 13. However, the school recognises that further work is needed on the precision of self-evaluation processes and the coordination of the provision for the progressive development of pupils' advanced reading, numeracy and digital skills.

Senior leadership roles are linked closely to whole school priorities. The headteacher has considered carefully the allocation of these responsibilities to make the best use of individual skills and to build capacity for future leadership. Senior leaders have established purposeful relationships with middle leaders but their line management of them does not always provide a sufficient level of challenge and support. This is particularly the case regarding their evaluation of the impact of teaching within their areas of responsibility. This contributes to leaders at all levels not always identifying areas for development in teaching and learning, or planning for improvement, precisely enough. In general, pastoral leaders have a secure understanding of the strengths and areas that are most in need of improvement. They have a sound knowledge of the pupils and their families that helps to ensure timely support where necessary.

The school has established a clear whole-school framework for self-evaluation and improvement planning. This is underpinned by a structured range of quality assurance activities, which enable all leaders to draw upon a suitable range of first-hand evidence. This helps them develop a broad overview of the strengths and areas for improvement. However, self-evaluation and improvement planning lack sufficient precision across leadership at all levels. Leaders rely too heavily on summative data and compliance with school approaches. Consequently, their evaluations of teaching are too generous.

Senior leaders have established a coherent and strategic approach to professional learning within the school. The school's Professional Development Review (PDR) process is underpinned by a clearly defined professional enquiry cycle which supports staff development at all levels. This provides a clear framework that supports professional

reflection over time. The structured model for professional learning includes a teaching and learning group that trials strategies prior to wider implementation, and a clearly defined professional enquiry cycle. This model aligns well with the school's priorities for improving aspects of teaching and learning as well as individual and departmental needs. However, the quality and rigour of the professional enquiry is too variable. In general, the school does not evaluate the impact of professional learning and enquiry on pupils' learning well enough. Staff value the professional learning opportunities available to them, including the targeted coaching and guidance when additional support is required. The school is a lead partner school for Initial Teacher Education, and this offers opportunities for staff to develop aspects of their practice such as mentoring.

The school has been successful in addressing national priorities, such as improving attendance and supporting the attainment of those pupils from low-income households. Leaders have a pro-active approach to tackling the impact of poverty and the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) is used sensibly to ensure that pupils eligible for free school meals have access to educational visits, laptops and school uniform. During the academic years from 2023 to 2025, the attendance and performance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals has consistently been better than that of their counterparts in similar schools.

Governors are proud advocates for the school. They contribute appropriately to the strong safeguarding culture within the school and fulfil the role of critical friends successfully. The rigour they bring to their work, aligned with their wealth of relevant experience, provides considerable benefit to the strategic direction and progress of the school.

The headteacher, governors and business manager monitor the school budget closely and highly effectively. They ensure that funding is targeted suitably to whole school priorities and expenditure, including grant funding, is evaluated robustly.

Additional information

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

A site management concern was raised during the inspection, and the local authority has been notified.

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.

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