

A report on

Llanwern High School

**Hartridge Farm Road
Newport
NP18 2YE**

Date of inspection: April 2026

by

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

About Llanwern High School

Name of provider	Llanwern High School
Local authority	Newport City Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	1101
Pupils of statutory school age	990
Number in sixth form	111
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%)	37.8%
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%)	8.9%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	1.2%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	8.9%
Lead partner for Initial teacher education	No
Date of headteacher appointment	01/01/2024
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	15/01/2017
Start date of inspection	27/04/2026

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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

Staff at Llanwern High School work hard to offer pupils of all abilities and backgrounds a supportive environment based upon care and mutual respect. Many staff, at all levels, understand the school's vision of providing 'nurture, growth and success'. As a result, many pupils feel safe in school and behave appropriately in lessons. Despite some improvement since 2023-2024, pupils' attendance has remained well below that of similar schools. Attendance in the sixth form is also too low.

The school has suitable processes to help pupils with additional learning needs (ALN), including an alternative curriculum programme in a suitably calm environment. However, not all of these pupils have sufficient access to mainstream provision. Pupils with autistic spectrum condition are supported appropriately in the school's specialist resource base. Most of them develop positive attitudes to learning and many make at least the progress expected.

In a majority of lessons, teaching helps pupils to make the progress they should while a very few, mostly older pupils, make stronger progress. In these lessons, purposeful relationships between teachers and pupils create a generally productive and supportive atmosphere. This helps pupils to engage with their learning and feel less anxiety about making errors. In a minority of lessons, shortcomings in teaching do not allow pupils to make the progress they could. This is usually because teachers' expectations of what pupils can do and how they should behave are too low.

The school's coordination of and provision for the progressive development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are underdeveloped. Overall, there are limited opportunities for pupils to apply and develop these skills in worthwhile and appropriately challenging contexts. This includes reading, though the school does recognise the importance of it to pupils' attainment, life chances and well-being.

The school's senior leaders have started to establish a positive culture around improved behaviour and attendance. Most leaders at all levels are strongly committed to the school. However, their roles and responsibilities are not equitable, and they are not all held to account robustly enough for the quality of their work. As a result, the effectiveness of leadership is too variable across the school.

Prudent financial management has secured a stable and sustainable financial situation that benefits the school. Grant funding is used appropriately though currently the impact on the outcomes of pupils eligible for free school meals remains below that of similar schools. Governors are committed advocates for the school, though their understanding of the school's work is too limited.

The inspection team brought a couple of safeguarding issues to the school's attention.

Recommendations

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

- R1 Address the safeguarding issues identified during the inspection
- R2 Improve attendance
- R3 Improve teaching so that all pupils are challenged to make good progress
- R4 Strengthen the leadership of, and provision for, the progressive development of pupils' reading, oracy and writing skills across the curriculum
- R5 Strengthen the leadership of, and provision for, the progressive development of pupils' numeracy skills in relevant subjects
- R6 Strengthen processes for self-evaluation, improvement planning and accountability

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 which shows how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress about 12 months after the publication of this report.

Main findings

Teaching and learning

In the very few lessons where pupils make strong progress, teachers have clear ambition for their pupils' learning. They understand well pupils' current level of knowledge and understanding, and plan carefully for further progress. In these lessons, which are mostly those for older pupils, teachers allow pupils time to think and respond to challenging questions, pose supplementary questions to extend thinking skills and plan time for independent learning.

In the majority of lessons, teaching has a generally positive impact on pupil progress, including that of pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) and has no more than a few minor shortcomings. Teachers often establish suitably purposeful relationships which help to develop pupils' resilience and reduce any anxiety they may have about making mistakes. They establish useful classroom routines that help pupils to settle quickly and prepare them for the lesson. They circulate the room supporting pupils' and trying to dispel any misconceptions they may have. A minority of teachers support learning suitably by modelling appropriate practical skills and secure verbal and written responses. On a few occasions, this includes encouraging pupils to improve their spoken and written expression.

In a minority of lessons, teaching has shortcomings that impact negatively on pupil progress. For these lessons, teachers' plan activities that keep pupils busy rather than improving their learning. Often, their expectations of what all pupils can do are too low and they are too tolerant of limited effort and poor behaviour. Their classroom management, specifically the failure to address persistent off task talk and behaviour, impedes pupils' progress. Their questioning does not probe pupils' understanding or challenge them to develop their verbal responses. A number of these teachers are slow to begin lessons which contributes to pupils being passive and disengaged in their learning. On occasions, they do not demonstrate secure subject knowledge which is reflected in limited explanations and inaccurate use of subject-specific vocabulary. In a few instances, they do not use enough of the relevant target language.

Most pupils are polite, respectful and welcoming to visitors, and interact confidently when spoken to. The majority demonstrate positive attitudes to learning, listen attentively to teachers and engage suitably with tasks. They sustain concentration, work well independently and collaborate effectively in pairs or groups when expectations are clear, particularly in practical contexts.

Literacy

Overall, provision for the progressive development of pupils' literacy skills is not strategically planned or coordinated well enough. A minority of subjects across the curriculum plan a few suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their basic literacy skills, but overall pupils do not have enough opportunities to apply and develop their skills in a range of relevant and challenging contexts.

Around half of pupils listen carefully to their teachers and peers and respond suitably to questions and instructions. They use a range of relevant subject specific terminology and share their views appropriately with others. However, around half of pupils do not listen well enough to their peers or teachers and often miss information that would support their learning. In addition, they offer only brief and underdeveloped responses and are not challenged or supported well enough by their teachers to improve their answers. In a few instances, where teachers have higher expectations of oracy skills, they model effective verbal responses and academic vocabulary. However, overall, teachers do not develop pupils' spoken vocabulary well enough.

When writing, many pupils paragraph their work accurately. Around half have suitable opportunities to write for different purposes and audiences and, as a result, adapt their tone and style of writing appropriately. When given the opportunity, these pupils plan their writing suitably to organise their ideas and sequence them logically. However, around half of pupils produce writing which is too brief and lacks technical accuracy. Too often, teachers do not encourage pupils to proofread their work. As a result, around half of pupils continue to make basic errors and lose control in their written expression. Teachers' feedback for literacy is too inconsistent and does not support pupils well enough in identifying and improving the quality of their writing skills. Pupils' potential to develop their writing is also restricted by teachers using poorly structured worksheets which limit the space for pupils to develop their responses fully.

Numeracy

The majority of pupils have secure basic number skills and apply these appropriately in routine calculations, for example when multiplying and dividing whole numbers or calculating basic percentages. Around half of them demonstrate confidence and fluency when working with directed number and a majority do so when calculating the volume of a cuboid and working out probabilities. However, a minority of pupils have weak, incomplete number skills and do not organise their working out systematically enough. As a result, they do not routinely identify errors, and this limits the progress they make.

Across the curriculum, pupils benefit from a few planned opportunities to practise and apply their numeracy skills. In science, for example, a majority calculate mean reaction times accurately, although a minority lack accuracy and precision when constructing graphs. At times, teaching does not build pupils' conceptual understanding sufficiently well and, on occasions, relies on procedural 'short cuts' that restrict pupils' progress. Overall, provision for the progressive development of pupils' numeracy skills, both within mathematics and across the curriculum, is underdeveloped because tasks do not provide enough challenge or purposeful application.

Digital skills

In digital lessons, pupils have a few worthwhile opportunities to develop their producing skills, for example by using layering when constructing vector graphics. Across the curriculum, there are a few suitable opportunities to develop their wider digital competence, which include the use of 2D design in technology. Overall, opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their digital skills are limited.

Welsh

Many pupils make sound progress in developing their ability to speak, read, write and understand Welsh, with a very few making strong progress. Many pupils pronounce Welsh accurately, and a majority respond confidently to questions or when translating simple phrases from English into Welsh. Most pupils demonstrate positive attitudes towards the language and engage willingly in activities.

However, a few pupils have a limited understanding of the language and struggle to read basic words.

Across the school, a minority of staff use Welsh when teaching, and while leaders are beginning to promote everyday Welsh, for example through *Diwrnod dathlu'r Gymraeg*, this work is at an early stage.

Specialist Resource Base

The specialist resource base (SRB), which caters for pupils with autistic spectrum condition, has a caring and respectful ethos built on high quality relationships between staff and pupils. Staff plan an appropriate curriculum that enables most pupils to participate positively in their learning. They differentiate activities suitably and, as a result, many pupils make at least expected progress from their starting points. Most pupils have positive attitudes towards learning and share their work confidently.

Occasionally, pupils are not challenged sufficiently to further develop their communication skills and a minority struggle to sustain concentration.

Curriculum

Leaders have taken sensible steps to review and refine their curriculum. Their curriculum vision, to be authentic, broad and balanced, and to meet the needs of all learners, aligns well with the school's wider values of nurture, growth and success for all.

Staff collaborate purposefully across areas of learning experience to identify and design key concepts and assessments. However, the concept-led curriculum and assessment process is in its infancy, and leaders have not evaluated its coherence and suitability in enabling all pupils to make progress in their learning. As a result, pupils, parents and staff do not have a clear overview of how well pupils are progressing in terms of their knowledge and skills, and their next steps in learning. Leaders work appropriately with partner primary schools to support continuity in a few aspects of learning, but in general, they do not have a secure overview of how the curriculum builds upon prior learning.

Overall, the school provides a broad and balanced curriculum across most areas of learning experience in Year 7, 8 and 9. Leaders have recently adapted aspects of the curriculum suitably to support vulnerable pupils though it is too early to fully evaluate the impact of this. Pupils in Year 10 and 11 benefit from a suitable range of academic and vocational qualifications, which supports equity and meets the needs of most learners. For example, in most cases pupils have a full range of options, including construction, music, and health and social care. In the sixth form, pupils have access to a suitably broad and balanced curriculum offer as a result of collaboration with local schools.

The school has identified a few opportunities to strengthen its work on careers and work-related education. For example, leaders have re-established links with external partners to support curriculum enrichment opportunities. However, this aspect of the school's work remains underdeveloped.

The school provides a broadly suitable programme of personal and social education (PSE), which generally supports pupils' personal development appropriately by exploring relevant themes such as well-being, safety and online behaviour. However, pupils in the sixth form do not have sufficient support for their personal development. In addition, the school does not maximise the use of time and information to strengthen pupils' knowledge and understanding of relationships and sexuality

Across the curriculum, there are a few suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of Welsh culture and identity. For example, pupils foster a sense of cynefin when learning about the Chartist movement in history. Through religion, values and ethics lessons, pupils learn about a range of spiritual, moral and ethical issues, such as the implications of animal testing.

The school also develops pupils' understanding of different cultures through several worthwhile whole-school events, such as 'CultureFest' and 'WinterFest'. However, opportunities to learn about the history and experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, as well as the LGBTQ+ community, do not permeate the curriculum provision well enough.

Well-being, care, support and guidance

Llanwern High School strives to provide a caring and supportive environment. This includes improving relationships between staff and pupils and building a culture of respect. Leaders have recently introduced a range of purposeful changes to behaviour policies and practices, such as year group 'zones' for morning registration, a mobile phone ban and restrictions on movement during lessons. These changes are beginning to impact positively on behaviour and well-being with many pupils behaving appropriately in lessons. However, a minority of staff apply the school's behaviour policy inconsistently.

A range of helpful internal interventions within 'Cedar' and the 'Learning Support Centre' (LSC) provide worthwhile, nurturing opportunities for vulnerable pupils to reflect upon and regulate their behaviour before returning to learning. Leaders work purposefully with a range of suitable partners such as local sports teams, youth services and charities to support pupils' well-being and encourage positive behaviour. There are beneficial alternative provisions for pupils who struggle to engage with learning, such as 'Aspire'. These, along with developing restorative approaches, have helped the school to reduce significantly fixed-term exclusions. While pupils on reduced timetables have suitable plans, these plans are not reviewed regularly enough during the academic year.

Many pupils say that they do not feel bullied in school. Although the school has an appropriate graduated response to tackling bullying, pupils feel that incidents are not always dealt with effectively enough.

Leaders ensure all staff and governors receive regular safeguarding training and understand their role in safeguarding pupils. However, they do not receive sufficient information about how to recognise and deal with any concerns about radicalisation. All staff have access to an electronic system to record any concerns and these help form a holistic picture of pupils' experiences. The safeguarding team responds to concerns swiftly and carefully, making appropriate referrals to external agencies when needed. As a result, many pupils are happy in school. They feel safe and secure and have a trusted adult to report any safeguarding concerns to.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including sport, music, cookery and the Duke of Edinburgh Award, which are open to all. They also take advantage of a variety of enrichment opportunities, such as theatre visits and trips to local outdoor activities, residential experiences and an overseas visit to Africa. Community engagement is given a high profile, for example, the school choir attends the local nursing home to perform. Together, these experiences support pupils to develop confidence and healthy lifestyles.

The school has appropriate arrangements to support transition at key points and provides helpful information and guidance to pupils and parents, including through individual mentoring, to support their next steps. Leaders work effectively with partners, including Careers Wales and local universities, to support progression, although a minority of sixth form pupils do not engage fully with the support available.

The school has recently increased its capacity to improve attendance and has begun to implement a range of strategies to promote this aspect and to support pupils whose attendance is a cause for concern. This includes an 'Emotionally Based School Avoidance' provision, 'Re-engage and Re-integrate' programmes and a dedicated attendance officer support role. However, these strategies are at an early stage of development, are not always clear to all staff and not used consistently, which limits their impact.

Between 2023-2024 and 2024-2025, attendance improved but remained well below that of similar schools. Although the school's unverified data suggests that it is continuing to improve in 2025-2026, attendance, including that of pupils eligible for free school meals, remains significantly below pre-pandemic levels and that of similar schools. Persistent absence continues to be too high and remains well above local and national comparators, despite some recent reductions. As a result, attendance remains a significant concern. Attendance in the sixth form is too low. This is compounded by low expectations and inconsistent monitoring of sixth form pupils, which weaken safeguarding arrangements and restrict pupils' access to in-person teaching.

The school has a particularly wide range of separate provisions to meet the needs of pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). This includes the alternative curriculum programme, 'Alder', where pupils undertake appropriately challenging work in calm, studious environments. They also benefit from well-being experiences such as golf tuition and fishing. However, a few pupils are not provided with sufficient challenge to make the progress expected from their starting points. The school's nurture classes support pupils with ALN to access mainstream lessons effectively through a strong focus on basic skills. The school has suitable arrangements to identify, support and monitor the needs of pupils with ALN, although, overall, there are too few opportunities for these pupils to interact and integrate with mainstream provision.

Pupils with barriers to learning have helpful one-page profiles with appropriate targets for progress. The school has a toolkit for meeting the needs of these pupils, but professional learning in implementing these strategies is at an early stage. Consequently, a minority of staff do not have enough expertise to support these pupils' learning well enough.

There are a few worthwhile opportunities for pupils to take on leadership roles, for example the well-established Senedd. This has led to a few beneficial changes, such as the introduction of the new water fountains and changes to the rewards system. Other opportunities for pupils to take on leadership roles and develop these skills include undertaking coaching roles in physical education lessons. However, overall, there is limited evidence of a coherent, all-school approach to developing pupils' leadership skills. The limited involvement of pupils in governing body meetings, restricts the opportunities for them to contribute fully to school improvement.

Leading and improving

The headteacher is a compassionate leader with a strong moral imperative to improve the lives of pupils. Senior leaders share a clear and positive vision for the school, centred on 'nurture, growth and success for all'. Over the last few years, leaders have strengthened working relationships with staff, while establishing a clearer and more consistent culture of accountability. This is beginning to have a positive impact on important aspects of the school's work, including improvements in attendance and behaviour.

The senior leadership team provides generally sound coverage of key areas. However, the distribution of roles and responsibilities does not always ensure clear accountability, and a few senior leaders carry a disproportionate workload. While professional development and review arrangements are appropriate and underpinned by a clear strategy, the level of challenge within line management processes is too variable. In a minority of cases, leaders are not held to account robustly enough for the quality and impact of their work.

Most middle leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to their roles, and many are developing their understanding of the curriculum, particularly in relation to key concepts and skills within their areas of learning and experience. However, there remains too much variability in the effectiveness of middle leadership overall. Around half of middle leaders have an underdeveloped understanding of progression, particularly in relation to curriculum and assessment design. In addition, a minority have a limited strategic overview of their areas, including weak oversight of provision, standards and progression.

Leaders have recently taken sensible steps to strengthen their processes for evaluation and improvement, which has supported the majority of them to establish a suitable understanding of the strengths and areas for development in their areas of responsibility. However, they do not always evaluate provision rigorously enough. In particular, they do not focus well enough on the impact that provision has on pupil progress and well-being. This limits their ability to plan precisely enough for improvement. Leaders are beginning to use data more purposefully to identify pupils in need of support and to inform interventions. However, overall, the use of data lacks sufficient depth and consistency to evaluate impact and to drive improvement effectively.

Improvement planning across the school is broadly appropriate and there is sensible alignment between whole-school and team priorities. While the majority of leaders evaluate the impact of their improvement plans at key points and identify next steps, in a minority of cases, they do not adapt their planning well enough to bring about necessary improvements.

Most Areas of Learning and Experience leaders engage in a suitable range of quality assurance activities. A few use evidence from these processes well to improve provision in their areas, but many have an overgenerous view of the quality of teaching, provision and pupils' progress. Heads of year are starting to gather first-hand evidence to support their strategic understanding of their roles, although this is at a very early stage of development.

Leaders have recently established a suitable culture of professional learning. They are beginning to use the outcomes of self-evaluation to inform the professional learning programme beneficially. However, they do not currently evaluate the impact of professional learning on, for example, the quality of teaching or standards in pupils' literacy skills, closely enough.

Leaders manage the school's finances effectively and have secured a strong and sustainable financial position. They have a clear understanding of the school's financial context and use this well to plan strategically, including a carefully controlled reduction of surplus aligned to school priorities. Leaders have taken decisive action to improve efficiency, review contracts and generate additional income, enabling investment in staffing, facilities and pupil support, particularly in literacy, numeracy and pastoral provision.

Recently, leaders have strengthened appropriately the whole-school approach to reducing the impact of poverty. The pupil development grant is now used to provide a wide range of support, including expanded pastoral provision, specialist interventions and practical assistance such as food, equipment and financial support to families.

The curriculum and enrichment offers are adapted to reflect pupils' needs and interests, and there is a growing focus on engaging parents and the wider community. While there are early signs of improved attendance, behaviour and engagement, outcomes for pupils eligible for free school meals remain below those of similar schools.

Governors are committed and supportive of the school and, at times, provide appropriate challenge, for example in relation to staffing levels and provision such as the breakfast club. However, overall, their understanding of the school's work is not sufficiently well developed, including their responsibilities related to healthy eating and drinking.

Leaders are beginning to address national priorities, but progress in these areas has been slow. As a result, leadership has not had sufficient impact on key aspects of provision and outcomes. Overall, while leadership has established a clear vision and strengthened aspects of the school's culture and organisation, it has not secured consistent or sustained improvements across all important areas of the school's work.

Additional information

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils give 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 overall, 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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Publication date: 01/07/2026