



Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on
Elfed High School

**Mill Lane
Buckley
Flintshire
CH7 3HQ**

Date of inspection: November 2010

by

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



**INVESTORS | BUDDSODDWYR
IN PEOPLE | MEWN POBL**

During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the school's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

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Context

Elfed High School is an English-medium 11-18 mixed comprehensive school serving the town of Buckley. It is maintained by Flintshire local authority. There are currently 704 pupils on roll, including 94 in the sixth form. There were 870 pupils on roll at the time of the previous inspection in November 2004. The school currently has a surplus capacity of 30% spare places.

Thirteen of the Elfed High School students are based in the Flintshire additional learning needs resourced provision, 'Hafan', which opened on the site in September 2009. An additional nine students are dual registered with Ysgol Maes Hyfryd (the special school in Flint) and attend a second resourced provision in Elfed High School which also opened in September 2009.

Traditional industry in Buckley has closed down over the years and light industry has taken its place on several sites in the town. Very few pupils (around 1%) live in the 20% most deprived areas in Wales.

A total of 9.5% of pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is well below the average of 17.1% for secondary schools in Wales.

The number of pupils who speak Welsh at home is very small. Just under 97% of pupils are from a White British ethnic background. Four pupils are learning English as an additional language.

In the current academic year, 2.7% of pupils have a statement of special educational needs. A total of 25% of pupils are on the school's special educational needs register.

Significant changes have been made to the leadership structure since 2006. The number of assistant heads has been reduced from a total of four in 2006 to one in 2009. New posts for 'learning directors' have been created in key stage 4 and post-16. The leadership team also includes seven 'associate members'.

The 2010-2011 individual school budget per pupil for Elfed High School is £3,788, which compares with a maximum of £4,429 and a minimum of £3,557 for secondary schools in Flintshire. The school has the sixth highest budget per pupil out of the 12 secondary schools in Flintshire.

Summary

The school's current performance	Good
The school's prospects for improvement	Good

Current performance

Current performance is good because of:

- good and improving achievements by pupils;
- the widening range of courses the school offers to learners at key stage 4 and in the sixth form;
- good provision for promoting pupils' wellbeing; and
- effective arrangements for care, support and guidance.

Prospects for improvement

Prospects for improvement are good because of:

- the significant trends of improvement over recent years in attainment, attendance and behaviour;
- the quality of leadership at senior level and its considerable impact in improving outcomes;
- a track record of managing change in challenging circumstances; and
- the way senior managers identify and challenge underperformance.

Recommendations

In order to improve, the staff and governors of Elfed High School need to:

- R1 improve the quality of teaching, especially in relation to challenging pupils to achieve higher standards in lessons, including pupils of higher ability;
- R2 ensure that rigorous and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems become fully embedded across all areas of learning;
- R3 establish systems to ensure more accountability of middle managers;
- R4 further improve attainment in the sixth form; and
- R5 extend the good practice in marking to help pupils have a better understanding of next steps and how to improve the quality of their work across subjects.

What happens next?

The school will produce an action plan that shows how it will address the recommendations. Progress in addressing the recommendations will be monitored by the local authority.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

There have been significant trends of improvement in key stage 3 and key stage 4 results over the last three years. Results have generally improved at a faster rate than Wales and the family of schools.

In key stage 3, there was an improvement of 13 percentage points in the core subject indicator (the expected performance in English or Welsh, mathematics and science, the core subjects of the National Curriculum) in the three-year period from 2007 to 2009. In 2010 performance in the core subject indicator dipped to well below the average for the family of schools, but was well above the estimate of performance based on previous attainment and school context factors. When compared to similar schools in terms of the free school meals benchmarks, performance in the core subject indicator has been below average in two of the last three years. The proportion of pupils gaining level 5 or above in writing in English does not compare favourably with other schools in the family. The proportion of pupils gaining level 6 or above is well above the family of school's average in mathematics, but lower than the average in English and in science.

In key stage 4, results in 2010 continued the trend of improvement in previous years. In 2010, performance was higher than expected in all indicators and compares favourably with the family of schools. When compared to similar schools according to free-school-meals benchmarks, results in 2010 were around the average. In 2010, results in the core subject indicator and the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh and mathematics were well above the estimates of performance based on previous attainment and school context factors.

Results in the average wider points score in key stage 4 (comprising externally approved qualifications at age 16) have improved but are lower than expectations. Performance continues to be well below the average for similar schools.

In the sixth form, the proportion of learners attaining the level 3 threshold has improved and is now higher than the Wales figure. The average wider points score has also improved but is still lower than the Wales figure. In many subjects, not enough students gain the expected grades.

The gap between the performance of boys and girls is generally near or less than the Wales figures. Pupils with additional learning needs make good progress. In 2010, all 'free school meals' pupils attained the level 1 threshold in key stage 4, and a half of the small number of pupils did as well as expected in attaining the level 2 threshold.

No pupil left Year 11 in 2010 without a recognised qualification. Numbers were low in previous years. The proportion of pupils continuing with full-time education at the end of key stage 4 is near to the Wales average. The percentage of learners not in

education, training or employment is lower than the average for Flintshire and well below the Wales figure.

In lessons, learners apply themselves well to tasks and display positive attitudes to learning. They work productively in pairs and small groups, and persevere when completing tasks individually. Most pupils make good progress in the majority of lessons. In a minority of lessons, pupils of higher ability are not doing as well as they could.

Most pupils use their communication, numeracy and information and communications technology (ICT) skills competently to complete tasks in a range of contexts across subjects. In a minority of lessons, pupils do not contribute well to discussion by offering more extended responses to exchange ideas and views. Groups of pupils receiving additional support for communication and number skills in key stage 3 and key stage 4 make good progress.

In Welsh second language, there was a considerable improvement in key stage 3 results in 2010 to well above the Wales figure. In key stage 4, the proportion of pupils who gained a qualification in Welsh in 2010 was well above the national average. Very small numbers gain a qualification in the full GCSE course in Welsh second language. In Welsh lessons, pupils generally apply themselves well to tasks. Not enough pupils make good progress in linking sentence patterns and using Welsh with increasing independence.

Wellbeing: Good

Nearly all pupils feel safe in school. Most participate in a range of physical activities and understand the importance of healthy living. Around half of sixth form pupils do not feel they are sufficiently involved in sport and physical exercise.

Over the last four years, there has been a significant improvement in attendance as a result of a number of effective strategies. Attendance remains below average when compared to similar schools nationally but compares more favourably with the family of schools. There was a considerable improvement in attendance in the sixth form last year.

Pupils are well-behaved in lessons and around the school. The school's behaviour and motivation policy has contributed to a reduction in fixed-term exclusions. The average number of days lost to fixed-term exclusion in 2009-2010 was lower than the Wales and Flintshire figures. The number of permanent exclusions is low.

Most pupils are well-motivated and have positive attitudes towards their learning.

A majority of pupils play an active role in the local community and the school supports a number of local, national and international charities. Key stage 4 pupils in particular participate in a wide range of community activities.

Pupils are increasingly involved in decision-making through participation in a number of different forums. These include the School Council, eco-group and nutrition action group. The role and effectiveness of the school council is developing and pupils

have recently participated in the appointment of pastoral assistants. Although pupils give their views on a range of issues, they do not have a say on issues relating to learning and the school curriculum. Associate pupil governors provide an increasingly effective link between the School Council and the governing body.

Pupils respect and relate well to each other. Older pupils are involved in the peer mentoring scheme that supports and encourages younger pupils. Senior pupils have responded well to increased responsibilities. Pupils acquire the skills to prepare for life and work outside school.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Good
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Learning experiences: Good

The school offers a wide range of curricular and extra-curricular learning experiences. A strong feature is the extensive use of local employers and international links to enhance provision, including that which meets the needs of more able and talented pupils.

The school meets the statutory requirements for the curriculum in key stage 3.

The school has worked in partnership with the local college to extend the options on offer to 14 to 16-year-old pupils. The offer in key stage 4 is in excess of the minimum requirements of the Learning and Skills Measure (Wales) for September 2012. Good features include the Welsh Baccalaureate, enrichment courses for the more able and talented, the Principal Learning Qualification in engineering and level 1 courses for the less able.

Options for post-16 students have improved through involvement in the South Flintshire Consortium. However, many post-16 class sizes are small and there is duplication within the local curriculum offer.

The school assesses the skills levels of all pupils and provides effective intervention for pupils in need of additional support. Lesson plans identify opportunities for skills development. In the few best examples, teachers plan activities that develop skills effectively. However, the planning for progression in skills development across and within subject areas is inconsistent.

The NVQ course in Cymraeg Busnes was introduced in Year 10 this year to improve pupils' attitudes and levels of motivation in Welsh second language. No student follows a Welsh second language course in the sixth form. Pupils have increasing opportunities to come into contact with Welsh through extensive use of bilingual signs and notices. Many teachers use Welsh when taking the register and to greet pupils and give basic commands. However, not enough teachers encourage pupils to respond in Welsh and use what they have learnt in Welsh lessons.

Pupils are involved in a number of activities that develop their understanding of sustainable development and global citizenship. The school's working group is currently carrying out an audit of provision as a basis for better whole-school planning. Overall, the work is at an early stage of development.

Teaching: Adequate

Teachers identify clear learning objectives and these are shared with pupils at the start of lessons. Most lessons consist of a suitable sequence of activities that ensure pupils are engaged in learning throughout lessons. Teachers make good use of a range of learning resources.

The quality of relationships between pupils and teachers is good. There is a purposeful learning environment in most lessons. In almost all instances, teachers deal effectively with occasional low-level disruption.

In a minority of lessons, there is not enough challenge to ensure pupils think in more depth and exchange ideas. Meeting the needs of pupils of different abilities, especially more able pupils in mixed ability classes, is an important area for improvement.

The school makes extensive use of assessment information to track the progress of individual pupils. There are effective systems to identify under-performance and provide additional support to individual learners and groups when needed.

The overall quality of marking is inconsistent. A minority of teachers provides pupils with detailed comments on their written work. Not enough teachers help pupils to understand what to do to improve their work.

Parents receive detailed reports on the progress of their children. Most reports identify strengths and weaknesses clearly. Teachers and pupils usefully identify steps for improvement.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school promotes effectively the health and wellbeing of all pupils. There are good arrangements for ensuring the safety of pupils and for dealing with any incidents of bullying.

Provision for pupils with additional learning needs is a particularly strong feature of the school. Pupils who attend the two resourced provisions are fully included in all aspects of the school. They receive skilled and sensitive support to improve their learning and behaviour.

Generally, there are effective systems for identifying additional learning needs and providing appropriate levels of support to help pupils develop their skills and confidence. However, pupils with additional learning needs do not always receive the support they need when they are in mainstream classes.

A wide range of support and advice is available through the pastoral system and from specialists working with the school and from other agencies. Trained senior pupils provide good support to younger pupils. The school co-ordinates well regular multi-agency meetings to plan and monitor intervention work for vulnerable pupils.

The school successfully promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The school has an appropriate safeguarding policy and procedures for safeguarding.

Learning environment: Good

The school promotes equality and diversity effectively. Personal and social education sessions and links with a school in Sri Lanka contribute well to raising awareness of issues relating to matters such as race and gender. Policies and procedures for recognising equality are well established. Pupils receive equal access to all areas of the school's provision.

The accommodation is of good quality in the refurbished parts of the school and adequate in the rest. Although the school has 30% of surplus places, it is using the space well to allow further refurbishment to take place during term time without affecting pupils' learning. The school makes full use of available resources.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Good
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Leadership: Good

Leadership at senior level has had a significant impact in improving standards over recent years. This has been at a time when the school has faced challenges as a result of falling roles and reductions in staff numbers.

In response to these challenges, an extended leadership team has been set up to take responsibility for specific school improvement activities. This approach is having a positive impact not only in driving whole-school initiatives but also in providing useful professional development opportunities. This is a strong feature.

Leadership has also had a clear impact on behaviour and attendance. A whole school focus on encouraging pupils to take individual responsibility for their behaviour and learning is having a positive impact on pupils' attainment.

Senior leaders use data well to identify areas for improvement, to set pupil targets and monitor progress. Most curriculum area and subject leaders meet regularly with their link member from the senior leadership team. However, there are no formal written records and agreed actions of these meetings. Line management and systems to ensure accountability of middle managers are not fully developed.

The governing body is fully involved in strategic planning and evaluation at whole-school level. The chair of governors has a good understanding of current school performance and aspects in need of further improvement. As a result of the current initiative in linking governors to curriculum areas, governors now have an increasing understanding of performance in individual subjects.

The school takes good account of local and national priorities. It is extending curriculum options for 14 to 19-year-old learners. Leaders are also taking good account of the School Effectiveness Framework in its development of professional

learning communities. The school has a bilingualism action plan that identifies worthwhile steps to promote the use of Welsh in the life and work of the school.

Improving quality: Adequate

Senior leaders are very effective in evaluating the work of the school and in securing necessary improvements. Their work has led to significant improvement over recent years in attainment, attendance and behaviour. A key part of their work is the way that they identify and challenge underperformance in any part of the school. Senior leaders are in the process of developing the expertise of middle managers so that they can take on more direct responsibility for self-evaluation and improvement planning. Many middle managers are effective in evaluating the work of the areas they are responsible for. However, monitoring and evaluation systems are not yet fully embedded across all areas of learning.

Lesson observations have taken place in many subject areas. A minority of middle-managers make good use of a wide range of monitoring activities which includes extensive lesson observations and the scrutiny of pupils' written work on a regular basis. However, there is inconsistency between learning areas and subjects in the systematic use of first-hand evidence to monitor and evaluate standards of teaching and learning.

Leaders and managers make good use of performance data to monitor and plan for improvement. Data is used to identify targets for whole-school and departmental improvement. Whole-school and department development planning includes worthwhile initiatives and clear actions. However, a minority of middle managers do not use data well to compare performance with similar schools.

Teachers are increasingly involved in a good range of networks of professional practice within the school. All teaching staff are involved in school improvement working groups. Staff are supported well by continuous professional development. There is not yet a clear structure in place to evaluate the impact of school development projects on pupils' achievements.

Partnership working: Good

The school has developed effective partnerships with a wide range of providers and organisations.

The school has well developed links with its partner primary schools. Effective transition arrangements enable pupils to settle quickly in the school in Year 7. There are appropriate arrangements to promote curriculum progression and continuity between key stage 2 and key stage 3. A strong feature of the current arrangements is the exchange of good practice through peer observations by key stage 2 and key stage 3 teachers.

The school has good partnership arrangements with the South Flintshire Partnership and Deeside College, and extensive links with local employers. These are used well to increase the options offered to 14 to 19-year-old learners and enhance opportunities for the more able and talented pupils.

The school has extensive links with parents, carers and the wider community.

Resource management: Good

The school manages its resources well. It provides good value for money overall taking into account improving outcomes for learners, an increasing range of options at key stage 4 and the sixth form and effective leadership. However, in the sixth form, class sizes and attainment do not represent good value for money.

School development plans are costed effectively. Expenditure is monitored regularly, and ensures that enough funding is available to meet school and departmental priorities.

Staff are deployed effectively to utilise their time, expertise and experience to support learning. Staffing reductions have been managed well and staff morale maintained in difficult circumstances. Appropriate staff performance systems are in place. However, there is inconsistency in the monitoring of progress against the development objectives of individual members of staff.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

Eighty-eight parent questionnaires were completed. Overall, parents expressed positive views about the school.

Nearly all say that they are satisfied overall with the school and that their children settled in well and like school. The majority of parents say that behaviour is good. Most parents say that teaching is good and that homework builds on what is learnt in school. Nearly all feel that teachers have high expectations and that children make good progress. A majority of parents feel that the school treats pupils with respect. Most parents say that the school encourages healthy eating and regular exercise. Almost all are of the view that their children are safe at school.

Many parents feel the school provides good support for the individual needs of pupils and that they are kept well-informed about their children's progress. Most parents feel that the school is responsive to questions, problems or suggestions, and many understand the procedures for dealing with complaints. Most feel that the school encourages pupils to take on responsibility. The majority of parents feel that children are prepared well for the next stage in their education or work. Many say that there is a good range of activities, including visits and trips. Many parents are of the opinion that the school is well run.

Responses to learner questionnaires

Questionnaires were completed by 25% of pupils selected at random from across the age range. Overall, the views expressed by pupils are positive. There is no marked difference between the views of boys and girls.

Nearly all pupils feel safe in school and most feel they have someone to talk to if they are worried. Many pupils say that the school deals well with any bullying. Many are of the opinion that the school teaches them to keep healthy and that there are regular opportunities for physical exercise. However, around a half of sixth form students do not agree. Almost all pupils say they are making good progress and that teachers help them when they have problems. A minority of pupils feel that homework does not help them to understand and improve on work done in school. Almost all say they have enough books and equipment. A minority say that teachers do not treat all pupils with respect and that pupils are not well behaved. In key stage 4, the majority says that pupils are not well-behaved and around a half say that the school does not deal well with bullying.

Most pupils feel that staff respect them and their background. The majority feel that the school listens to their views and make changes they suggest. However, a majority of key stage 4 pupils do not agree. Almost all pupils feel that the school encourages them to take responsibility and most feel that the school prepares them well for the next stage in their education or work. Most say that the school helps

them to understand and respect people from other cultures. A minority of key stage 4 pupils say that they were not given good advice when choosing courses at the end of Year 9. Many sixth form students say that they were given good advice when choosing post-16 courses.

Most pupils feel that they are doing well in school and that there are enough resources to enable them to learn well. Most say that they have many opportunities to get regular exercise. Pupils say that teaching is good, and that they are encouraged to do things for themselves and to take on responsibility. Most feel that the school helps them to be ready for the next stage of education, training or work. Many pupils feel that the school deals well with bullying and that they have someone to talk to if they are worried. Many also say that they are treated with respect, and that they are helped to understand and respect people from different backgrounds. A majority of pupils feels that the school listens to their views.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Iolo Dafydd	Reporting Inspector
Catherine Evans	Team Inspector
Sue Halliwell	Team Inspector
Susan Roberts	Team Inspector
Janet Waldron	Team Inspector
Peter Haworth	Lay Inspector
Karen Holland	Peer Inspector
Paul Williams	School Nominee

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Year groups and key stages

Schools use a common system of numbering year groups from the start of compulsory schooling to 18 years of age. This system emphasises the importance of continuity and eases communication among schools, governing bodies, parents and LEAs.

The term 'Reception' (R) refers to the year group of pupils in a primary school who reach the age of five during the academic year. Year 1 refers to the year group of pupils who reach the age of six during the academic year and so on. Year 13 is the year group of students who reach the age of 18 during the academic year.

Primary phase:

Year	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Ages	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11

Secondary phase:

Year	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13
Ages	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18

The four key stages cover the following year groups:

Key stage 1	Year 1 and Year 2
Key stage 2	Year 3 to Year 6
Key stage 3	Year 7 to Year 9
Key stage 4	Year 10 and Year 11