



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru  
Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

**A report on**

**Gwernyfed High School  
Three Cocks  
Brecon  
Powys  
LD3 0SG**

**Date of inspection: March 2020**

**by**

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

## About Gwernyfed High School

Gwernyfed High School is an English-medium 11-19 school in south Powys that serves a wide, mainly rural catchment area.

There are currently 497 pupils on roll compared with 490 at the time of the last inspection in 2013.

Around 5% of the pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is well below the national average of 16.4%. No pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas in Wales. Nearly all pupils are from a White British background. Most pupils speak English as their first language and only a very few pupils speak Welsh at home. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is around 20%, which is a little below the national average of 23%. The percentage of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs is around 0.5%, which is well below the national average of 2.2%.

The current headteacher took up post in 2011. The senior leadership team consists of the headteacher, one deputy headteacher, one assistant headteacher, and the business manager.

The school is currently working with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward developments relating to the curriculum.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website at the link below.  
<http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/Schools/SchoolSearch?lang=en>

## Summary

The headteacher demonstrates a trusting and collegiate approach to leadership and his vision for a caring community is shared effectively. He is supported appropriately by a dedicated team of staff. However, self-evaluation processes do not focus well enough on key aspects of the school's work and lack sufficient rigour. Leaders' views of provision and standards across the school are therefore too positive. As a result, leadership has not led to sufficient or sustained improvements in the quality of teaching and assessment, attendance, pupils' attitudes to learning and the standards they achieve, including developing their skills.

Overall, Gwernyfed High School has a caring and respectful ethos where many pupils feel safe and generally well supported. Many pupils make suitable progress over time, have positive attitudes to learning and enjoy participating in the many beneficial activities that take place outside of lessons. However, in a minority of lessons a few pupils are too easily distracted and make insufficient progress, as well as disrupting the learning of others.

The school offers broadly appropriate professional learning opportunities for all teachers. However, it does not have a sufficiently co-ordinated approach to the progressive development of pupils' skills across the curriculum. In a minority of lessons, teaching and assessment do not challenge pupils well enough.

<b>Inspection area</b>	<b>Judgement</b>
<b>Standards</b>	<b>Adequate and needs improvement</b>
<b>Wellbeing and attitudes to learning</b>	<b>Adequate and needs improvement</b>
<b>Teaching and learning experiences</b>	<b>Adequate and needs improvement</b>
<b>Care, support and guidance</b>	<b>Adequate and needs improvement</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement</b>

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Improve the progress that all pupils make in lessons, including in the development of their literacy and numeracy skills and Welsh language development
- R2 Improve attendance overall and the attitudes to learning of a few pupils
- R3 Strengthen the quality of teaching and assessment
- R4 Improve the quality and impact of leadership at all levels, particularly by strengthening improvement processes
- R5 Address the health and safety issues raised during the inspection

## **What happens next**

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school is in need of significant improvement. The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress about 12 months after the publication of this report.

## Main findings

### **Standards: Adequate and needs improvement**

Many pupils make secure progress in their knowledge, understanding and skills during lessons. They recall prior learning suitably and use it to develop a sound understanding of their subjects. For example, in sociology, sixth form pupils apply and deepen their knowledge and understanding of the strengths and limitations of covert and overt participant observations effectively.

Many pupils listen to the teacher and their peers with attention and respect and are eager to contribute to class discussions. They share willingly their ideas and make purposeful contributions to group or class discussions, using subject specific terminology well across many areas of the curriculum. For example, in art lessons they discuss confidently how their work compares and contrasts with that of famous artists such as the ombre painting effect inspired by Banksy. A few pupils offer extended, well-considered responses to questions when, for example, describing the character of Gerald in 'An Inspector Calls'. However, a few pupils provide only simplistic answers and do not expand their ideas sufficiently. Often, this is because of a lack of challenge from their teachers.

Many pupils are able to locate and select relevant information confidently from a suitable range of texts. Many have a sound grasp of basic inference and deduction, for example when, in history, they interpret sources on dealing with life in the trenches during World War One. Many pupils demonstrate empathy with the characters they read about in English lessons which, in turn, helps them develop their responses to themes and issues such as the creation of tension in 'The Woman in Black'. However, a minority of pupils do not use reading skills well enough to identify relevant information and in a few subjects rely too heavily on copying out text.

In general, many pupils write suitably for a range of purposes and audiences. They produce writing that is structured well and communicates meaning coherently. For instance, they use appropriate language and techniques to write persuasively to the United States Senate about helping San Francisco to protect itself from the effect of earthquakes. A majority of pupils use subject specific terminology appropriately and use it suitably to write with sound technical accuracy. However, a minority of pupils frequently make common spelling errors and fail to punctuate their work securely.

Many pupils apply their numeracy skills suitably to different contexts and subjects when they have the opportunity to do so. This includes using their data skills assuredly in geography to draw accurate climate graphs to compare temperature and precipitation. More able pupils calculate confidently the comparative efficiencies of different kettles. However, a minority of pupils do not draw or label graphs or charts carefully enough or with sufficient accuracy, unless they are given clear strategies to follow.

Overall, pupils make appropriate use of their basic information and communication technology (ICT) skills across the curriculum. In general, they use ICT competently to research, produce presentations, word documents and excel spreadsheets. In technology, many pupils make effective use of computer aided design technology to create a 2D design of funky photo frames. However, for the most part, pupils do not develop more sophisticated ICT skills across the curriculum.

When they are encouraged to do so, pupils develop their creative skills well. For example, in drama, pupils experiment with aspects of gesture and tone of voice when developing a scene from 'Teachers' by John Godber. In English, pupils develop original ideas imaginatively when writing a poem on the theme of our polluted world, reflecting the style of the poet Brian Patten. Many pupils develop their physical skills well, such as in physical education lessons when they work successfully in pairs and groups to demonstrate sound co-ordination when passing and shooting in netball. They develop their thinking skills suitably, for example, when comparing and discussing two graphs showing corona virus mitigation goals in a personal and social education (PSE) lesson. In a minority of instances however, pupils are over-dependent on support and rely too heavily on the teacher to offer strategies to enable them to tackle and solve problems.

In general, pupils make little progress in developing their Welsh language skills. The majority of pupils have sound pronunciation when speaking Welsh though a minority lack the confidence to speak Welsh in front of their peers. The most able pupils can skim and scan to retrieve and infer information from simple texts in Welsh. At the end of key stage 4, around half of the cohort achieve a level 2 qualification. Across the school, pupils' use of the Welsh language outside of Welsh lessons is limited.

At the end of Year 11, nearly all pupils remain in education, employment or training.

Over the last three years pupils' performance in many indicators at key stage 4 is generally close to expectations. However, outcomes for more able learners over this period are variable. Many pupils with additional learning needs perform relatively well against their learning targets. Performance in the sixth form has improved over time and most pupils complete the courses they start. Performance is generally in line with that expected for grades A\*-C, but below that expected for grades A\*-A.

### **Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Adequate and needs improvement**

Most pupils greet visitors warmly and treat them with respect and courtesy. These pupils feel safe in school and believe that the school deals well with any incidents of bullying that arise. Many pupils enjoy coming to school and benefit from the range of learning experiences and extra-curricular activities that are provided. These pupils feel they are supported well and believe that the school has a good understanding of their individual needs. However, a few pupils do not feel that the school responds well enough when they share concerns or worries.

Most pupils arrive promptly to lessons, prepared and ready to learn. They approach tasks that engage them with enthusiasm and concentrate well on their learning. These pupils support each other well during group activity. More able pupils work productively in small groups, such as when discussing volunteer work in Welsh. In addition, many pupils have a caring attitude towards others, for example when supporting each other in drama lessons. Many pupils behave well in lessons. However, in a minority of lessons, the low-level disruption of a few individuals, mostly boys, hinders their learning and that of others.

Overall, many pupils in the sixth form demonstrate resilience when balancing their studies across a range of courses, some of which require them to use online learning or to travel to other schools across the South Powys Consortium.

Most pupils understand how to make healthy choices and take regular exercise, including from a wide range of sport and fitness opportunities. Many pupils take part regularly in other extra-curricular activities including fencing, art and community volunteering. These pupils participate enthusiastically, for example, in 'Crucial Crew' days with the 'Schoolbeat' police officer. Recently, sixth form pupils were trained as peer mentors and now volunteer beneficially to support Year 7 and 8 pupils with challenging mathematics activities.

The school council meets regularly and has been successful in highlighting issues that are important to all pupils such as making items of school uniform gender neutral. Council members help to plan fundraising events successfully. For example, they recently organised a charity day to raise money for a local good cause, the Brecon mountain rescue team. However, overall, pupils' leadership skills are underdeveloped and have had limited impact on influencing changes to teaching and learning in the school.

Rates of attendance do not compare well to those in similar schools over the last three years. This has a negative impact on pupils' progress and attainment in lessons.

### **Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement**

The school's curriculum is designed to maximise opportunities for pupils to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding, and takes helpful account of pupil interest and local community needs. Through useful collaborative partnerships within the regional consortium, the school is able to offer courses in agriculture and motor vehicle maintenance at key stage 4. The school also works appropriately in partnership with other local schools to ensure that the curriculum offer available to students in the sixth form supports effective progression and meets their needs and interests suitably.

The school provides a range of worthwhile extra-curricular opportunities such as drama, robotics and board games clubs. In addition, it offers many revision and subject clubs after school including some that offer additional qualifications, such as GCSE computer science. More able and talented pupils have the opportunity to engage with a number of pre-Seren and Seren activities to enrich their learning experiences.

The school provides valuable enrichment activities and community engagement events such as regular attendance at the Powys Careers Fair, the annual Hay Festival and maths master classes at Swansea University.

Most teachers have strong subject knowledge and many build positive working relationships that foster pupils' engagement with learning. A majority of teachers give clear instructions and explanations and introduce subject specific terminology appropriately to develop pupils' understanding of topics and subjects. These teachers prepare and use engaging and helpful resources that support pupils learning well. They plan a suitable variety of tasks and approaches to learning, including relevant, meaningful opportunities for pupils to use their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum.

In a very few lessons, where pupils make strong progress, teachers plan a variety of engaging and stimulating activities. They have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and ask probing questions that challenge pupils' thinking and understanding. These teachers ensure that there is an appropriate pace to the lesson that supports pupils' progress well.

In a minority of lessons, teaching is not effective enough. In these lessons, teachers do not have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils can achieve and their planning does not take sufficient account of pupils' abilities or prior learning. They do not plan learning activities to provide an appropriate challenge for all pupils, nor do they consolidate well enough pupils' learning before moving on to the next stage. As a result, pupils are not given enough opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills independently.

A majority of teachers use questions appropriately to determine pupils' recall and knowledge and to check understanding. These teachers provide pupils with useful verbal feedback to help them develop their work. In around half of lessons, teachers provide appropriate opportunities for pupils to explore, share and develop their ideas and understanding. However, a minority of teachers do not use questions well enough to deepen pupils' understanding or to enhance their learning.

There is too much variation within and across departments in the impact assessment has on improving pupils' work, and in teachers' expectations of pupils' response to feedback. A few teachers provide pupils with constructive and useful written feedback that outlines successes and what they need to do to improve their work. They ensure that pupils respond suitably to their comments and improve their work as a result. However, overall, teachers' written feedback is not precise enough and comments are at times superficial.

Teachers and faculty leaders identify suitable opportunities for pupils to practise their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. However, the school does not plan effectively enough for the progressive development of those skills, and, in general, teachers do not challenge pupils or enable them to apply their skills independently. In a few subjects there are valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their ICT skills across the curriculum including using spreadsheets in mathematics and composition software in music.

The school provides relevant opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of Welsh culture through activities including the school eisteddfod. As part of the school's work to support the development of the Curriculum for Wales, teachers have developed a topical humanities project for key stage 3 pupils on the history and geography of the local area. The provision for the development of pupils' Welsh language skills both within lessons and across the curriculum is limited.

### **Care, support and guidance: Adequate and needs improvement**

Overall, Gwernyfed High School's provision for care, support and guidance promotes pupils' wellbeing appropriately. The school is a caring community that encourages a largely respectful and inclusive ethos where pupils can flourish. All staff know the pupils well and offer a close network of support to ensure their wellbeing.



The school has developed a thorough and useful tracking system to monitor the progress of individuals and groups of pupils across all key stages. This provides staff with a comprehensive oversight of pupils' performance throughout the year. This information is used appropriately to identify those pupils who will benefit from a suitable range of interventions.

The school has comprehensive procedures for tracking attendance and behaviour. It makes suitable use of online homework, behaviour and attendance systems, enabling staff to reward good behaviour or effort. However, tracking and monitoring is not used well enough by leaders in order to identify or evaluate strategies for improving pupils' attendance. As a result, pupils' rates of attendance remain too low.

The learning support department provides sensitive and caring provision for pupils with additional learning needs. It offers pupils valuable assistance to help them integrate effectively into school life. This enables pupils to develop their confidence, feel safe and contributes to their sound outcomes. Targets in individual education plans are set appropriately according to individual needs. The school monitors individual pupils' progress carefully within the intervention schemes. However, this information is not used effectively enough by staff when planning their lessons or by the school to evaluate the effectiveness of this work. The school collaborates efficiently with a suitable range of external agencies to provide appropriate help to address the special educational needs of specific pupils, and to provide support for vulnerable pupils.

There is a wide and beneficial range of lunchtime and after school activities for pupils including a wide range of extra-curricular activities to develop pupils' social and creative skills. These include a variety of clubs including the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze and Silver Awards, creative writing and coding clubs. Activities such as the school production of 'School of Rock' in Theatr Brycheiniog, musical events and the Eisteddfod make an important contribution to pupils' cultural development.

A broad range of sporting activities such as netball, fencing, badminton, volleyball, rugby and athletics are offered as part of the school's efforts to encourage a healthy lifestyle. The School Nutrition Action Group promotes a healthy diet but despite campaigns by pupils this has not resulted in many changes to lunchtime menus. Appropriate PSE modules delivered through regular timetabled lessons promote suitably aspects of healthy eating and drinking as well as developing pupils' awareness of e-safety, global citizenship and sustainable development.

In general, the school supports suitably pupils' spiritual, moral and social development through registration periods, PSE lessons and assemblies. The school provides worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of the wider world through foreign visits. These are varied and include a ski trip to France, an art visit to Finland and an International Youth Week in Germany where pupils discussed the impact of the refugee crisis in Europe.

The school has satisfactory arrangements for communicating with parents and carers using a variety of methods, including half-termly newsletters and digital applications. These celebrate pupils' achievements and provide reminders of important dates and meetings. Generally, communication with parents focuses on alerts and information,

and does not offer a wide range of opportunities for opinions or feedback. Parents receive thorough information about pupils' progress and attendance through interim and annual reports which identify developing strengths and areas for improvement.

The school's procedures for safeguarding children are satisfactory. However, during the inspection, a few safeguarding and health and safety concerns were brought to the attention of the inspection team. As a result, Estyn will issue the school and local authority with a wellbeing letter, which will require a swift and appropriate response to these concerns.

### **Leadership and management: Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement**

Overall, there are strengths in many aspects of leadership, but they have not secured sufficient or timely improvements in provision and standards. As a result, key aspects of the schools work require urgent improvement.

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school that focuses on individual potential, celebrating success, and promoting a cohesive community. This ambition is shared by senior leaders, staff and stakeholders. The headteacher has succeeded in creating an ethos of mutual support and a strong sense of teamwork among staff. However, strategic planning does not identify precisely enough the objectives or how to fulfil the vision. Leaders have focused successfully on raising pupils' performance at key stages 4 and 5 but have not secured improvements in important areas including the quality of teaching, pupils' attendance and the standards they achieve throughout the school.

Senior leaders work together well and are supported enthusiastically by an extended leadership team. The roles and responsibilities of senior leaders focus appropriately on raising standards. However, the large span of responsibilities undertaken by senior leaders limits their capacity to address fully the key issues for improvement.

The school has developed beneficial management systems. Leaders use data effectively to identify individuals and groups of pupils who are underperforming against their targets, particularly at key stage 4 and in the sixth form. Regular calendared meetings and performance management arrangements provide accountability and focus appropriately on raising standards. However, leaders do not identify and implement suitable strategies to bring about improvements in aspects identified in these meetings, particularly to improve teaching.

Recently, the school has restructured leadership to take account of the Curriculum for Wales. Middle leaders have a sound understanding of recent guidance and work hard to explore ways to implement the new curriculum. However, despite their commitment to developing their faculties, they do not have a secure enough understanding of how to drive improvement in their areas of responsibility, and in particular, of how to improve learning and teaching.

There are relevant self-evaluation processes in place. These include activities to gather first-hand evidence of learning and teaching and taking suitable account of the views of stakeholders. However, these processes are not robust enough to identify areas for improvement clearly or precisely enough. Lesson observations do not evaluate sufficiently the effectiveness of teaching in terms of its impact on pupils'

progress. Work scrutiny focuses too heavily on compliance with processes, rather than the quality of standards and learning experiences. As a result, leaders hold too positive a view of provision and standards across the school.

Faculty self-evaluation processes are onerous and do not identify specifically enough areas for improvement. Overall, self-evaluation processes are not used in a sufficiently focused way to identify specifically what needs to improve, particularly in teaching. As a result, improvement planning is not sharp enough, and the resulting whole school priorities are too broad. Overall improvement planning is weak. Most shortcomings identified as recommendations in the last inspection report remain as issues.

Governors support the school competently. Generally, they challenge suitably and helpfully, and have a secure understanding of the work of the school. The quality assurance committee scrutinises school policies beneficially, and instigates improvements to practice, for example by suggesting useful amendments to the behaviour policy.

Generally, the school provides suitable opportunities professional learning. These include external courses and opportunities for staff to collaborate within professional learning groups and faculties. For example, teachers are working together productively to plan learning experiences to prepare for the introduction of the Curriculum for Wales and middle leaders have benefited from working with the senior leadership team. However, there are too few opportunities for staff to develop their leadership skills. Whole school staff training days cover a range of broadly appropriate issues. However, there is no overarching strategy to develop professional learning within the school. Furthermore, the school does not evaluate its professional learning activities thoroughly enough. As a result, professional learning has not had sufficient impact on the quality of teaching or the progressive development of skills.

The school budget is reasonably well-managed. However, spending is not directed well enough towards meeting the aims of the school or the needs of the pupils. Financial decisions about site security are not taken in a timely manner.

The school business manager is a member of senior team and plays a full role in decisions around spending. Governors support the management of the budget suitably through the finance committee. The sixth form provides value for money. Grant funding, including the use of the pupil development grant is appropriate, and is monitored and evaluated suitably.

The school is staffed appropriately and for the most part, subject areas are taught by specialists. The school provides training where necessary to support those who are teaching outside of their specialism.

## 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, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit a broad sample of classes, 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' wellbeing, 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

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website ([www.estyn.gov.wales](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

<b>Excellent</b>	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
<b>Good</b>	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
<b>Adequate and needs improvement</b>	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
<b>Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement</b>	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths

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

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publication Section  
Estyn  
Anchor Court, Keen Road  
Cardiff  
CF24 5JW or by email to [publications@estyn.gov.wales](mailto:publications@estyn.gov.wales)

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: [www.estyn.gov.wales](http://www.estyn.gov.wales)

© Crown Copyright 2020: This report may be re used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the report specified.

Publication date: 14/05/2020