



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

A report on
Cathays High School

Crown Way
New Zealand Road
Cathays
Cardiff
CF14 3XG

Date of inspection: May 2022

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Cathays High School

Name of provider	Cathays High School
Local authority	Cardiff
Language of the provider	English Medium
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	1037
Pupils of statutory school age	869
Number in sixth form (if applicable)	162
Percentage of statutory school age pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average <i>(The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in the secondary sector is 18.7%)</i>	35.8%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) <i>(The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in the secondary sector is 21.7%)</i>	13.9%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.6%
Percentage of statutory school age pupils with English as an additional language	29.5%
Date of headteacher appointment	
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	26/02/2013
Start date of inspection	09/05/2022
Additional information	

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.

Overview

Through inspirational leadership and a culture of high ambition underpinned by the mission of 'opportunities for all', Cathays High School is a highly inclusive and aspirational learning community where pupils and staff thrive.

Leaders have forged an ethos where pupils and staff feel valued and encouraged to excel. They are dedicated to developing both pupils and staff to get the very best out of them. Leaders at all levels maintain an unrelenting focus on evaluating and improving all aspects of the school's work, especially the effectiveness of classroom practice. Staff are knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and whole-heartedly committed to improving the life chances of pupils.

High expectations and well-established classroom routines provide a dynamic learning environment. Staff have an unwavering commitment to sharing good practice, improving teaching, and enabling all pupils to fulfil their potential. As a result, lessons are planned carefully and are adeptly delivered to stimulate pupils' interest and inspire them to achieve highly.

Valuable arrangements for supporting learners with a diverse range of needs are flexible, highly tailored to individuals and draw expertly on internal and external provision to remove barriers to learning. Bespoke programmes for different groups of learners, such as new arrivals with limited English language skills, skillfully support pupils in their learning and everyday school life. The provision for personal and social education is effective for most pupils.

There is a firmly established culture of safeguarding that pervades the school. All staff, through all aspects of their work, take personal ownership for ensuring that all pupils' needs are catered for in a sensitive and safe way. As a result, pupils thrive in this happy, safe, and caring environment and are exceptionally proud to belong to their school community.

Pupils place great value on and actively celebrate the school's cultural diversity. They treat each other with respect and successfully develop the key attitudes and behaviours that will help them to become life-long learners and ethical, well-informed citizens of Wales. They are polite and friendly and behave impeccably in lessons and around the school. They display an undeniably positive attitude towards their learning and school life in general.

Clear priorities emboldened by effective professional development support most pupils to develop their literacy, numeracy, digital, and Welsh language skills very well. The school's location at the heart of Cardiff and the diverse nature of the local community are important influences on the curriculum. This, along with the celebration of individuality and cohesion within the school community helps the school to develop and sustain its own bespoke cynefin (habitat).

Recommendations

R1 Strengthen the provision for personal and social education in Year 11

What happens next

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

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on its work for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main evaluation

Learning

In lessons, most pupils make good progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills. Many recall prior learning well and apply it successfully in new contexts. They progressively incorporate more complex language structures and vocabulary in their written work, and access more sophisticated reading texts. Pupils with additional learning needs make strong progress against their starting points and pupils in the specialist resource base achieve very well. As a result, nearly all these pupils progress to post-16 provision and higher education courses.

Nearly all pupils listen with attention to their teachers and peers. Most demonstrate the ability to evaluate critically, for example when exploring the best ways of describing the characters in 'Of Mice and Men'. Pupils respect different opinions and contribute confidently to class discussion. Many are able to evaluate different viewpoints critically and arrive at considered conclusions, for example in religious education when they explore how the world was created. Many pupils speak clearly and explain their thinking articulately. They use subject terminology proficiently during discussions with their peers and in their written work.

Nearly all pupils read with understanding and locate relevant information from a variety of sources. Many use inference and deduction to understand more complex texts and consider the reliability and impact of what they read, for instance when they analyse the poem 'Kembe La' to explore life in Haiti. They consider well how effectively texts convey information and engage the reader, such as when analysing how tension is built in 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time'. Many pupils use an appropriate range of strategies to analyse sources and identify key ideas and themes successfully. When given the opportunity, many pupils read aloud accurately and confidently.

Most pupils use a wide range of sentence structures and write confidently in a variety of styles to engage and influence the reader. They write accurately and clearly, for example when explaining why people live near volcanoes, or why the Qur'an is important to Muslims. Many pupils use punctuation well for different effects, such as to vary pace, clarify meaning and avoid ambiguity. They structure extended pieces of writing well and redraft their work successfully. Many pupils plan, record and evaluate their practical work, express their hypotheses clearly and discuss the outcomes methodically.

In relevant subjects, many pupils develop their number skills well. They collect raw data and represent it accurately using a variety of graphs. They use these and other graphical representations well to draw conclusions when, for example, investigating the link between the volume of oxygen and the time taken for a candle to burn out, or when they interrogate graphical representations of simple harmonic motion.

Pupils use their digital skills effectively and creatively for a variety of purposes such as when they use coding languages to design animations and use HTML to design websites. Many pupils develop their creativity and their thinking skills well across the curriculum. For example, they use a scratching technique, sgraffito, in art to develop

artwork that represents opposing concepts such as life and death, rich and poor, and they produce animations to explain concepts such as the relationship between white blood cells and bacteria. Nearly all pupils successfully develop their fine motor skills, balance, posture, rhythm, and stamina in their physical education lessons and in a range of practical activities across the curriculum.

Within the wide cultural diversity of Cathays High School, pupils embrace and value the Welsh culture highly. Most are confident in speaking in Welsh at an appropriate level relevant to their starting points. Many pupils are able to write at length using suitably complex vocabulary, for example when discussing the advantages and disadvantages of living in Cardiff.

Pupils in the sixth form are articulate and make strong progress in their learning. They use subject terminology and complex vocabulary well to challenge one another's thinking and critique the work of others. They demonstrate secure recall of prior learning and apply complex ideas to new and unfamiliar situations confidently and successfully.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Well-being is a clear strength at Cathays High School, and pupils place great value on how the school's cultural diversity is embraced and celebrated through school life. Pupils are exceptionally proud to belong to the school community, and thrive in the happy, safe, and caring ethos that has been established.

Nearly all pupils feel safe and secure and free from physical and verbal abuse. They feel respected and treated fairly, and in turn exhibit a high level of trust and respect for the school, its staff and each other. Most pupils know where to find the appropriate support for their well-being and any issues that worry them. Consequently, pupils are happy in school and have confidence that any issues around bullying will be dealt with appropriately. Most pupils are ambitious learners who are determined to make the most of their time in school. They are proud to uphold the school value of being 'prepared and focused for learning'.

Pupils have developed a very mature and informed understanding of the ethical issues facing the world. They show strong levels of respect and understanding for people from diverse backgrounds, faiths, and traditions. For example, pupils celebrate diversity through their participation in a 'languages day', where dance, music, and cooking form part of the cultural enrichment activity.

Most pupils have developed a sound understanding of the purposes of rules and are very supportive of the rewards and sanctions processes in school. They are then able to consider how laws are formed and applied to wider society. For example, in Year 9 all pupils read the novel 'A Boy with Two Hearts', written by a former pupil of Cathays High School that describes his experiences in joining the school as an asylum seeker.

Pupils are given clear guidance on how to make healthy choices relating to diet, physical activity, and emotional well-being, and are therefore well placed to make healthy choices. Good use is made of the school's rich and varied extra-curricular programme. A well-structured personal, social and health education programme

ensures that most pupils know how to keep themselves safe online. This is supported well by pupil ambassadors for well-being and digital skills.

All pupils, including those with additional learning needs, benefit from opportunities to develop their leadership skills and to take on responsibilities. They participate in appropriate decision-making, such as the school council and 'Rainbow Alliance' group. Sixth form students work well with younger peers in extra-curricular clubs and around the school in a supervisory capacity at break and lunch times. Pupils are developing further awareness of the impact of the work of the school council.

Nearly all pupils feel that they have a voice in school life and that their opinions and feelings are listened to with respect. Most pupils engage positively in the many opportunities that are available to them to contribute to school life and wider society. They are resilient and display confidence when working independently. They respond well to teachers' feedback, using it successfully to improve their work.

Pupils successfully develop the key attitudes and behaviours that will help them to learn throughout their lives. Nearly all are polite and friendly and display very positive attitudes towards their learning and school life in general. They demonstrate commitment to improving their understanding and skills and are engaged in their learning. They are very well behaved in lessons, during break and lunch times.

Owing to the coronavirus pandemic inspectors will not report pupils' rates of attendance during the academic years 2020-21 and 2021-22. Inspectors will, however, consider the school's provision for monitoring and improving attendance as part of inspection area 4 (care, support and guidance).

Teaching and learning experiences

The school develops pupils' literacy, numeracy, and digital skills effectively across the curriculum. Clear strategies, supported by helpful professional learning, have led to improvements in pupils' oracy and extended writing skills. Teachers' expertise in developing the literacy skills of pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL) has a beneficial impact on all pupils, for example through the deliberate teaching of vocabulary. The school has developed a robust programme to help pupils with weaker literacy and numeracy skills. Their progress is tracked closely using clear entry and exit criteria. Senior leaders have strengthened the co-ordination of skills in order to focus teachers' efforts on doing less but doing it better. Each subject has an agreed skills focus and selects specific aspects to develop in a way that is relevant for that subject.

The school has an ambitious vision for a broad and balanced curriculum which develops the essential knowledge and skills that will enable its pupils to compete effectively for employment opportunities and higher education places. The curriculum is strongly influenced by the school's multicultural context and by its location at the centre of the capital city. There is an important emphasis on Welsh culture within a diverse community. For example, there are modules on 'My Cardiff' in art and English and useful links with a number of local businesses. Teachers plan the curriculum carefully to ensure it reflects the diversity of the local community and is sensitive to different cultures. The school welcomes a large number of pupils during the school year as well as at the usual transition points. Appropriate curriculum pathways

provide tailored support at each key stage for all specific groups of pupils. The school integrates pupils swiftly and successfully into mainstream classes once they have acquired the skills they need. There is effective alternative provision for vulnerable pupils which enables them to engage with learning and gain worthwhile qualifications through increased support and part-time access to college.

The school offers a wide range of suitable academic and vocational options at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. The open option system allows most pupils to study their preferred subjects. In the sixth form, a partnership with local colleges increases the range of options further. Most pupils are positive about the opportunities that the Skills Challenge course provides to develop employability skills such as teamwork and presenting to an audience.

Senior leaders have carefully aligned the various strands of health and well-being provision to exploit the links between them. For example, when pupils are studying diet and exercise in well-being lessons, they carry out personal fitness activities in physical education and have assemblies and tutorials linked to these themes. The PSE programme supports the development of pupils' social and emotional skills effectively although more work is needed for the provision in Year 11.

The school has a wide range of well-attended extra-curricular activities before, during and after school, such as classes in community languages and clubs in cheerleading, boxercise and chess. During the summer term, the school runs a fortnightly timetable of enrichment activities in which pupils undertake extended learning sessions and various educational visits within and beyond Cardiff. This is successful in providing pupils with beneficial learning experiences to broaden their horizons.

Most teachers are enthusiastic about their subjects and share this enthusiasm with their pupils. They have up to date subject knowledge and are good language models. Most teachers set very high expectations for pupil behaviour and engagement. Classroom routines are very well established, and teachers apply them consistently. Most teachers have very good working relationships with their pupils and provide them with appropriate levels of support, encouragement, and challenge so that they can achieve as highly as possible. These teachers are firm without being forceful and this approach allows pupils to learn in a calm, inclusive and supportive environment. Teachers develop effective working relationships with vulnerable pupils through a welcoming and flexible approach.

Most teachers plan their lessons carefully with clear aims and objectives. They prepare a range of appropriate tasks and activities to engage pupils' interest effectively. They give pupils clear explanations of what they have to do and set them realistic time scales for their completion.

In many lessons, teachers use a variety of written and on-line materials to engage pupils. They make effective use of visualisers in class to highlight important points and to share examples of pupils' work. Many teachers use effective pace to ensure that pupils of different language competencies can engage and make oral and written contributions of value. These teachers use effective strategies, including frequent repetition, to promote pronunciation, vocabulary, comprehension and fluency, particularly with new arrivals to the UK.

Nearly all teachers give supportive verbal feedback in class. Many use effective questioning in class to check pupils' understanding and progress. They use a range of questioning techniques well, including open questions, targeted questions and effective use of mini-whiteboards. Many teachers provide clear thinking time so that all pupils have opportunities to prepare their answers.

Many teachers provide useful and constructive written feedback on pupils' work. Their feedback helps pupils to understand what they have done well and what they need to do to improve. In many lessons, teachers use improvement activities effectively to encourage pupils to redraft their work and to extend their understanding.

Care, support and guidance

Cathays High School is a highly caring and inclusive community where effective care, support and guidance for all pupils is a significant feature of the school's work. The school fosters an inclusive and supportive ethos where pupils and staff feel valued and develop strong and respectful relationships within a nurturing and positive environment. A notable strength is the way that the school recognises and supports each pupil's unique individual needs and qualities. As a result, nearly all pupils feel safe, engage positively in their learning and thrive in school.

The school has comprehensive systems to identify pupils' needs and monitor their well-being, allowing it to respond in a timely and sensitive manner to provide support where necessary. Links with families, local primary schools and the wider community are strong. The school draws on rich, extensive sources of information to plan effectively for meeting pupils' social and emotional needs. It uses productive partnerships with a wide range of external agencies to enhance provision for pupils. For example, the school has established a Business Forum through which pupils benefit from valuable extended opportunities such as mentoring in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, careers presentations from local businesses and an art project linked to a Wales Millennium Centre exhibition.

The 'Safe Ty' provision is highly effective in supporting pupils' emotional health and well-being. Following comprehensive identification processes, including self-referral, pupils benefit from a diverse range of tailored interventions both within school and in conjunction with external partners. There is a sharp focus on the monitoring and evaluation of interventions to ensure pupils' ongoing needs are being met. The dedicated pastoral team is especially effective in helping pupils who are new arrivals to the UK settle into school life. In addition, the school provides extensive support for young carers. These strategies have a notable impact on the progress and engagement of pupils in need of support.

Provision for pupils with additional needs is a particular strength of the school. There is a staged approach to support, which is underpinned by positive relationships and strong values of inclusion. The 'Learning Pathways' and 'Extended Opportunities' programmes at Key Stages 3 and 4 are integrated well with mainstream provision. They are highly effective in addressing barriers to learning and in helping pupils develop important life skills such as social communication, cooking and how to travel safely. Pupils in the specialist resource base receive outstanding care, support and guidance that helps them develop their confidence and self-esteem and make

considerable progress from their starting points. Learner profiles and learning plans, which are created in partnership with pupils and their parents or carers, are highly effective. The school uses innovative approaches to planning for provision, for example by using guinea pigs as a means of helping pupils to develop responsibility and empathy.

Spiritual, moral, social, and cultural education is an important part of the school's work and the school promotes equality and diversity well. There is a well-embedded, whole-school approach to developing pupils' understanding of their identity, heritage, and culture. In addition, there are suitable structures in place for pupils to take on responsibilities and participate in decision-making, such as the School Council and LGBTQ+ group. The school provides suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their creativity through both lessons and extra-curricular experiences such as dance and art clubs and the annual Eisteddfod. Pupils benefit from the wide range of well-attended sporting activities and competitions such as basketball, boccia, and table tennis.

The school promotes good attendance and uses an extensive range of strategies to monitor and address poor attendance. Arrangements to keep pupils safe are clear and robust. The school responds to safeguarding concerns promptly and effectively. Staff show consistently high levels of commitment to ensuring that pupils' safety and well-being are at the heart of their day-to-day work, including how they plan their lessons and resources and carry out their role as form tutors.

Leadership and management

The headteacher has a clear vision for raising aspirations, broadening horizons and maximising the achievement and well-being of pupils that is framed around the school's mission to provide 'opportunities for all'. This vision is well understood and shared by all staff and permeates every aspect of the school's work. As a result, leadership at all levels has a significantly positive impact on pupils' progress and well-being.

The headteacher provides thoughtful, reflective strategic leadership, and is supported purposefully by the senior management team. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and well understood by all, and staff have a sound understanding of how these roles combine to secure improvement. Strategies are effectively coordinated and integrated to maximise their impact and are focused unrelentingly on improving pupil outcomes and classroom practice.

A strong culture of self-improvement and collaboration pervades all aspects of the school's work. Senior leaders put a strong emphasis on securing high levels of staff well-being through, for example, celebrating good practice and supporting innovation. The headteacher deploys staff adeptly in order to make best use of their skills and experience. The school provides an extensive range of professional development opportunities, often using innovative approaches tailored to individual needs. This has helped to create a staff body that works collaboratively to secure the best possible outcomes for pupils.

The culture of professional learning throughout the school is a notable strength. Staff have an exceptional commitment to sharing, developing, and evaluating good

practice both within and across academic and pastoral teams. Professional learning activities are integrated carefully with arrangements for line management, self-evaluation, and performance management. The robustness of these arrangements ensures that professional learning has a consistently positive impact on pupil outcomes and the quality of teaching.

Self-evaluation processes are based on an extensive range of first-hand evidence, including feedback from pupils and parents, and involve all staff. Leaders use these processes astutely to identify specific development needs and plan precisely to address them. As a result, the school has a strong track record of securing improvement, including responding to the recommendations from the last core inspection. In addition, it has helped the school to address national priorities such as developing pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills, promoting the Welsh language, reducing the effects of deprivation and developing a clear vision for the design of the Curriculum for Wales. In addition, leaders have established a strong safeguarding culture, where staff consistently support and promote the safety, well-being, and engagement of all pupils through all aspects of their work.

The governing body provides the school with valuable support. They have a sound understanding of the school's main strengths and areas for development and play a suitable role in setting and reviewing improvement priorities. They ensure that there are appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

The headteacher and business manager, supported by governors, manage the school's resources skilfully to maximise staff effectiveness and pupil outcomes. They monitor expenditure carefully to ensure that all spending is targeted on key priorities and use funding such as the pupil development grant well to improve the progress and well-being of vulnerable pupils.

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

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.

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:

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