



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

**A report on**

**Newtown High School**

**Dolfor Road  
Newtown  
Powys  
SY16 1JE**

**Date of inspection: October 2023**

**by**

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

## About Newtown High School

Name of provider	Newtown High School
Local authority	Powys County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	1007
Pupils of statutory school age	936
Number in sixth form	70
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 20.2%)	18.0%
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 17.8%)	28.0%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	2.4%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	2.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2018
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	18/05/2015
Start date of inspection	16/10/2023

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](https://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

Since the school was removed from special measures in October 2021, the headteacher and his staff have worked diligently to continue to improve key aspects of the school's work. Strengthened arrangements for self-evaluation and improvement planning have enabled leaders at all levels to make beneficial improvements to teaching and arrangements for care, support and guidance. As a result, many pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), make sound progress in lessons. Attendance, including that of pupils eligible for free school meals, has also improved well.

In many lessons, effective teaching helps pupils to progress in their knowledge, understanding and skills. Most pupils behave well and engage positively in their learning. Many feel safe in school, but a few feel that the school does not deal with issues quickly or effectively enough. This is often because the school does not communicate to pupils and parents the actions it has taken clearly enough.

Senior and middle leaders carry out many aspects of their roles enthusiastically and effectively. This has a positive impact on, for example, how well teacher feedback supports pupil progress. However, although in general leaders evaluate teaching and learning robustly in order to identify areas for development, they do not always evaluate the impact of leadership thoroughly enough. As a result, whole-school improvement strategies are not always carried out consistently across both campuses. In addition, senior leaders do not ensure that middle leaders collaborate with their counterparts on the other campus to strengthen provision across the whole school.

## Recommendations

- R1 Refine leadership responsibilities so that the school's improvement work has a consistent impact across the two campuses, in particular provision for the development of pupils' literacy, numeracy and Welsh skills
- R2 Improve communication between staff, and with pupils and parents, to develop cohesion, effective collaboration and a consistent sense of community across the whole school
- R3 Continue to refine evaluation and improvement processes so that they take full account of the impact of leadership on the outcomes of all pupils

## What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will work with the local authority to review the school's progress.

## Main evaluation

### Learning

Many pupils, including those with ALN, make suitable progress in their learning and a few make strong progress. Many recall prior learning well and are able to apply their knowledge and understanding to new contexts successfully. For example, pupils apply their knowledge of the history of their school when analysing primary and secondary sources. A few pupils do not make sufficient progress, most often due to a lack of challenge offered to them by their teacher.

Most pupils listen carefully to their teachers' instructions and to the contribution of their peers. Many contribute confidently to class discussions. A minority, when challenged to do so, provide well-developed responses and explain and justify their opinions well. A few pupils are highly articulate and use a wide range of vocabulary and subject terminology. However, a very few pupils do not listen well enough to their teachers or are reluctant to contribute to class discussions.

In most cases, pupils locate information accurately in a variety of texts. Many can identify different writing techniques appropriately and make valid observations regarding the impact language and structure has. For example, they compare the depiction of the First World War in the poems of Wilfred Owen and Jessie Pope. More able pupils analyse texts perceptively, using quotations well to explain their interpretations. The majority of pupils summarise and synthesise information drawn from a range of texts competently, for example when considering the causes of the Notting Hill Riots or when examining the difficulties faced by the NHS. A few pupils, however, demonstrate misunderstandings or make overly simplistic observations when completing reading tasks.

Many pupils write with suitable accuracy and clarity. When given the opportunity, they write for an appropriately wide range of purposes and audiences across the curriculum. A few produce highly engaging and thoughtful pieces using a broad range of vocabulary and a variety of effective techniques. A minority of pupils occasionally lack control in their writing, and a few make regular basic errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Many pupils demonstrate sound number skills. For example, in mathematics they work with linear sequences and identify the term-to-term rule appropriately. They calculate accurately using fractions, indices and standard form and use these successfully to solve problems. These pupils develop a secure understanding of shape, such as when they identify examples and non-examples of polygons and calculate areas, perimeters and volumes of compound shapes. They confidently use units of measurement to gauge the accuracy of drilling and cutting in design technology lessons and ensure suitable accuracy when measuring mass in science. When given the opportunity, many pupils interpret graphs thoughtfully, for example to analyse temperature and rainfall in Brazil. A few pupils do not choose the correct graph to represent data or draw them with sufficient accuracy.

In Welsh lessons, many pupils read short texts to extract relevant information. With support, they construct simple written sentences. A minority of pupils can write basic

sentences independently. A very few pupils can converse in Welsh with confidence. However, in general, pupils lack confidence in spoken Welsh and find it difficult to pronounce simple words.

Pupils develop their digital skills well across the curriculum, for example when creating their own designs for an animation inspired by online resources, or when assessing the value of web-based sources of evidence in history. In general, pupils develop their physical and creative skills well, such as when they lead their own warm-up activities to develop muscle activations in physical education, or when creating their own Memphis inspired clock designs in technology.

Sixth form pupils are positive about their learning experiences. In lessons, they are enthusiastic learners who positively engage in tasks and recall prior knowledge well. They are articulate, using a range of appropriate vocabulary, and choose suitable resources to solve problems. They understand their role in the school and respect the additional privileges and resources they have been given, such as laptops for their period of study.

### **Well-being and attitudes to learning**

Most pupils are friendly and courteous, and welcome visitors warmly. They engage well in conversations with adults, speaking maturely about their views and their learning. Many feel safe in school and believe that they are treated fairly. They feel well supported, particularly by the staff in the 'Canolfan Lles' well-being centres. A few pupils do not always feel safe in school because they believe that the school does not respond to bullying in an effective or timely enough way.

In general, pupils behave suitably during break and lunchtimes. In most cases, pupils engage appropriately in their learning. They arrive punctually and show respect to each other and their teachers. Many are enthusiastic learners who are keen to answer questions and show interest in their work. They show resilience in their learning and do their best to complete tasks successfully. In a few lessons, a few pupils' disruptive behaviour has an impact on the progress of others.

Overall, pupils have an appropriate understanding of how to have a healthy lifestyle. They participate actively in sports clubs, such as badminton and karate, and the Duke of Edinburgh award. They are aware of the importance of tolerance and understanding and develop appropriately as ethical citizens. They understand the importance of promoting diversity, equality and inclusion, for example by celebrating Black History Month.

Pupils in the sixth form take an active role in school life, for example by leading extra-curricular activities for younger pupils. Pupils of all ages develop their leadership skills through roles such as well-being ambassadors or maths champions.

A few pupils contribute appropriately to decision-making by being part of the 'School Assembly'. This is beginning to have a worthwhile impact on school life, for example by helping to shape the new behaviour system. However, pupils are not always aware of what this group does or how it benefits the school as a whole.

During the academic year 2022-2023, attendance, including that of pupils eligible for free school meals, improved well. However, persistent absence remains too high.

### **Teaching and learning experiences**

Most teachers develop positive working relationships with pupils and engage them successfully in their lessons. They have secure subject knowledge, are good language role models and reinforce subject terminology well. Many use suitable questioning to check pupils' understanding. They have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and make effective use of classroom management strategies where necessary.

The majority of teachers plan suitably for pupils' learning. They prepare useful resources, which engage pupils well and offer valuable opportunities for them to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. These teachers provide clear explanations and model work effectively to demonstrate the expected standard of work. They provide a suitable level of challenge and ensure that the pace of teaching closely matches the pace of learning. A minority of teachers adapt their approach adeptly to provide pupils with helpful additional support where needed.

In a few particularly effective lessons, teachers have notably high expectations of what pupils can achieve and plan their lessons accordingly. They use questioning techniques skilfully to probe pupils' understanding, deepen their thinking and develop their verbal responses.

In a minority of instances, teachers do not plan consistently well enough. They sometimes provide activities that keep pupils busy but do not extend their learning. These lessons are often insufficiently demanding, too teacher-led and do not challenge pupils to work independently. In a few cases, teachers do not use classroom management strategies effectively, which allows off-task behaviour to disrupt learning.

In many lessons, teachers provide timely verbal feedback which addresses pupils' misconceptions and supports progress. These teachers also give useful written feedback that helps pupils to improve their work. In a few instances, carefully designed feedback activities enable pupils to make substantial improvements. In a few cases, teachers' feedback does not make clear enough how pupils could develop their work.

Overall, the school provides a balanced curriculum, which meets the needs of most pupils well. Pupils at the Newtown campus have a suitable range of options at Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, including vocational courses such as agriculture and health and social care. However, pupils at the John Beddoes campus have a restricted choice of option courses at Key Stage 4. Extra-curricular activities such as the gardening club and the equine club provide pupils with valuable learning experiences outside the classroom.

Leaders have a clear vision for the development of their Curriculum for Wales. The school works well with local primary schools to design engaging learning experiences that build appropriately on pupils' prior learning. For example, humanities subjects are beginning to develop pupils' sense of 'cynefin', that reflects the local context of

each campus, through a range of activities such as visits to nearby churches and museums. The 'Taith Saith' provision contributes beneficially to pupils' transition from primary to secondary school.

Pupils at the Newtown campus benefit from a range of suitable opportunities to practise and develop their literacy, numeracy, and digital skills across the curriculum. However, skills provision for the pupils on the John Beddoes campus is not as well developed. The school identifies those pupils who have weaker skills and provides them with beneficial interventions.

The school fosters an appreciation of Welsh culture and heritage appropriately through, for example celebrations of Diwrnod Shwmae Su'mae and Dydd Santes Dwynwen. The comprehensive personal and social education programme helps pupils to understand important issues such as the experiences of LGBTQ+ and black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. The school uses pupil feedback well to adapt this provision, for example by establishing an Equality and Diversity Council.

### **Care, support and guidance**

Leaders in Newtown High School foster an inclusive ethos where many pupils feel valued and treated fairly. The school promotes and celebrates good and improving attendance. It works well with a range of partners to monitor and address poor attendance successfully.

Staff provide well-considered care and guidance to pupils and their families. They take their responsibility to support the well-being of all pupils seriously, including those who are most vulnerable. The 'Canolfan Lles' centres on each campus offer sensitive and valuable support to pupils who access them. Staff encourage healthy, positive relationships and mutual respect. They celebrate warmly the uniqueness of each individual. In addition, 'Canolfan Cyfle' provides valuable well-being interventions for specific groups of pupils such as pupils with English or Welsh as an additional language and those who find attending school more challenging due to their emotional or physical health.

The ALN team offers beneficial support to pupils with a range of additional learning needs. Staff review and evaluate specific interventions carefully. The additional need co-ordinator (ALNCo) and well-being leads offer valuable training for staff to enable them to support vulnerable pupils appropriately across the school. Helpful one-page profiles provide useful information for teachers to inform their planning. However, evaluation of the impact of support for pupils with ALN across the school is underdeveloped.

The school works closely with local partners to support the safety and well-being of its pupils. For example, they link with Presteigne cricket club, arrange theatre trips to Hereford, and work with a local Newtown church to offer support for pupils from low-income households. They welcome a wide range of visitors including representatives from the Senedd and UK government. Despite this, a few parents and pupils feel that opportunities are not equitable across both campuses.

There are a wide variety of valuable opportunities for pupils to develop an understanding of right and wrong. The school investigates thoroughly any incidents

of alleged bullying and racist incidents. They utilise school staff, external partners and restorative approaches well to support the pupils involved. However, a few pupils and parents do not feel that their concerns are dealt with quickly or taken seriously enough.

Pupils explore their spiritual and ethical beliefs through the beneficial activities in learning mentor time. In addition, subject teachers build in time across the curriculum for pupils to explore social, moral, spiritual and cultural aspects in the topics they study. Positive lifestyle choices are promoted appropriately, including regular exercise and healthy eating.

Along with membership of the 'School Assembly', each campus offers pupils a wide variety of leadership opportunities. This includes acting as well-being ambassadors and participating in groups that celebrate diversity such as Tutti Fruttis and Rainbow Warriors. Through these groups, pupils are able to share their views and bring about change. For example, feedback gathered by the student ambassadors has resulted in well-received modifications to the rewards system. As a result of these amendments, more pupils feel motivated to behave well than under the previous system. A few pupils, however, still feel rewards and sanctions are not allocated fairly.

Pupils benefit from useful guidance when making choices about the next stage of their education. They receive helpful support to match the available options to their individual needs. Pupils, including those with ALN, receive helpful careers advice and guidance.

Staff and the governing body promote a strong safeguarding culture. Arrangements to keep pupils safe are clear and robust. The school responds to safeguarding concerns promptly and diligently and makes the necessary referrals to outside agencies. All staff receive regular training for safeguarding and child protection and are clear about the school's arrangements for keeping pupils safe. In addition, the school's arrangements for digital security for pupils and staff are robust and up to date. Staff work well with a wide variety of external partners such as the police to implement a range of strategies to help pupils keep themselves safe when online, and when considering safe lifestyle choices.

## **Leadership and management**

The headteacher provides assured, supportive leadership and is developing a culture of high expectations for leaders, staff and pupils. He and his senior leadership team work diligently to improve important aspects of the school's work. This has helped to secure improvements in, for example, the quality of teaching and pupil attendance.

The headteacher has established a clear vision for the school where all members of the school community 'belong, believe and achieve'. This is particularly important to the school because of the challenges created by having two campuses that are a considerable distance apart. Recently, the school has reorganised some senior roles in order to strengthen this sense of belonging, and this has brought some benefits. In particular, staff, parents and pupils value the continuity created by having two senior leaders based permanently at the John Beddoes campus.



Despite this recent reorganisation of roles, leaders have not secured a consistent sense of community and collaboration across both school campuses. Although in many instances senior leaders understand and fulfil their roles appropriately, responsibilities for some important priorities are not clearly enough defined with regard to how whole-school improvement strategies are carried out across both campuses. As a result, there is too much variation in how well whole-school priorities, such as the progressive development of pupils' skills, are addressed across the whole school.

In general, leaders at all levels focus suitably on addressing national priorities. They have made sound progress in developing their Curriculum for Wales. In order to reduce the impact of poverty on pupil outcomes, they have introduced a number of beneficial strategies, which have led to improvements in both attainment and attendance for these pupils. The school has made sound progress towards the implementation of ALN reform. However, strategic leadership of this area of the school's work is hampered by the demands placed on the ALNCo across two campuses.

Overall, middle leaders are enthusiastic about their areas of responsibility and in many instances carry out their roles effectively. They value the support and challenge they receive through regular and purposeful line management meetings. However, senior leaders do not ensure that middle leaders collaborate frequently or effectively enough with their counterparts on the other campus in order to share best practice and support each other. This reduces how successfully middle leadership can drive improvement across the whole school.

Leaders at all levels carry out a suitable range of activities to collect first hand-evidence about learning, teaching and well-being. A helpful quality assurance calendar supports leaders to have a balanced focus on the different aspects of their work. In many cases, leaders focus closely on the impact of provision on pupil outcomes. This helps them to set clear priorities that are well understood by their teams. However, in a few cases, leaders' evaluations are not robust enough. In particular, they do not consider sufficiently well the impact that teaching has on pupils' learning. In addition, the school does not evaluate the effectiveness of leadership consistently robustly enough, especially the impact that leadership roles have across the whole school.

Performance management objectives are, in general, linked suitably to whole-school and department improvement priorities. However, evaluation of these objectives is too often limited to whether actions have been completed and does not focus closely enough on impact on pupil progress. Professional learning activities are linked suitably to performance management arrangements as well as self-evaluation and improvement planning processes. In general, these activities support both individual needs and whole-school priorities appropriately. Staff value the beneficial opportunities to share good practice within their subject areas on each campus and use these experiences appropriately to develop their provision.

The school has recently taken a variety of steps to strengthen the way in which it shares information with and seeks the views of pupils and parents. This is beginning to help it respond purposefully to feedback, such as by providing additional parents' evenings. However, shortcomings in communication impact negatively on a few

aspects of the school's work. For example, pupils and parents are not always aware of how the school has dealt with incidents of poor behaviour or bullying. Also, middle leaders often do not know enough about the improvement work being carried out by their counterparts on the other campus.

Governors are committed supporters of the school. They provide beneficial and relevant challenge to senior leaders and help set the school's strategic direction. They work purposefully with the headteacher and business manager to manage the school's budget. Governors support leaders appropriately in delivering national priorities and ensure that there are appropriate arrangements for healthy eating and drinking.

## 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.

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