



Report summary for parents and carers on Cyfarthfa High School

Date of inspection: March 2024

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

Overview

Leaders across the school demonstrate a clear commitment to the school community and provide a caring and supportive environment. Since his appointment, the headteacher has set high expectations regarding attendance, behaviour and pupils' engagement in learning.

The curriculum at key stage 4 generally offers a suitable range of general and vocational subjects. Adjustments have been made to the curriculum to successfully improve outcomes for a small number of pupils at risk of disengagement. The most vulnerable pupils, including those with significant additional learning needs (ALN), benefit from bespoke programmes of study. Leaders have worked with local primary schools to develop a curriculum that builds suitably on pupils' prior learning. However, there is insufficient provision for the progressive development of pupils' numeracy and literacy skills, particularly their advanced reading and writing skills. This hinders their successful progress.

Pupils receive a range of suitable support for their wellbeing and progress. For example, pupils receive support for their additional learning needs, to boost their competence in basic literacy and numeracy and have opportunities to engage in programmes aimed at improving their self-esteem, resilience and engagement in education. Pupils benefit from a wide range of extracurricular activities. They appreciate the opportunities available to develop an understanding of and respect for different cultures, values and life choices. However, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to develop their leadership skills. Staff work well together and with partners to provide pupils with a caring and supportive environment that encourages pupils at risk of disengagement to stay in education. Pupils in the Learning Resource Base receive an engaging curriculum that considers their starting points well. Attendance is below that of similar schools and the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals is below that of Wales. Pastoral and wellbeing leads do not evaluate the impact of their activities well enough to identify what aspects of their provision are having the most impact.

Most pupils are respectful to visitors, staff and each other. Many feel safe in school. They arrive promptly to lessons, behave well, and engage productively in their learning. Where teaching is strong, nearly all pupils engage purposefully in class discussions and other learning activities, and most make strong progress. However, a minority of pupils are passive in their learning, and too many pupils leave work unfinished. These pupils make limited progress overall. Overall, there are important weaknesses in teaching in a minority of lessons, including in core subject areas, where planning and teaching approaches did not meet pupils' needs well enough.

Since his appointment 18 months ago, the headteacher has demonstrated a secure understanding of the broad strengths and areas for development in the school and improvement planning considers these areas appropriately. He has supported senior and middle leaders appropriately in forming a better understanding of quality in their areas of responsibility. However, the current leadership structure does not provide robust line management arrangements across the curriculum, particularly in core subjects. Many leaders have an overly positive view of the quality of provision in their areas and do not identify areas for development precisely enough. This hinders their ability to plan robustly for improvements in pupils' learning and well-being. Overall, leadership has not had enough impact on addressing shortcomings in teaching, improving attendance, the development of pupils' skills and their use of Welsh outside of Welsh lessons. A few health and safety concerns were raised by inspectors during the inspection.

Recommendations

- R1 Ensure the leadership structure is equitable and has clear roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability
- R2 Sharpen self-evaluation and improvement planning to focus precisely on the most important aspects of provision that need to improve
- R3 Address weaknesses in teaching so that it impacts positively on pupils' progress in lessons and over time
- R4 Strengthen provision for and coordination of the progressive development of pupils' literacy, numeracy and digital skills
- R5 Improve pupils' attendance
- R6 Address the health and safety issues identified during the inspection

What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that special measures are required in relation to this school. The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. This is the most intensive level of statutory follow-up. Estyn will monitor the school's progress on a termly basis following the publication of the inspection report.



School context

Name of provider	Cyfarthfa High School
Local authority	Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Secondary
Number of pupils on roll	858
Pupils of statutory school age	857
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 21.2%)	19.1%
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 14.8%)	14.7%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	0.8%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2022
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	14/03/2016
Start date of inspection	18/03/2024

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