A report on

Darland High School
Chester Road
Rossett
Wrexham
LL12 0DL

Date of inspection: January 2019

by

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

About Darland High School

Darland High School is an English-medium 11 to 16 mixed community comprehensive school in Wrexham. There are 848 pupils on roll, which is higher than the 717 pupils at the time of the last inspection. The school serves the village of Rossett and the surrounding rural areas. A majority of pupils come from the northern suburbs of Wrexham. Around 9% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is lower than the national average of 16.4%. Nearly all pupils speak English as their first language. Most pupils come from a white British heritage. Very few pupils are fluent Welsh speakers.

The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is slightly lower than the national average of 22.9%. Around 3% of pupils have a statement of special educational need, which is higher than the national average. The school has two specialist resource bases serving the local authority for seven pupils with dyslexia and 35 pupils with autism and communication difficulties.

The headteacher was appointed in 2009. The senior leadership team consists of one deputy headteacher, two assistant headteachers, and the business manager.

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

Senior leaders at Darland High School have been successful in establishing an ethos of care and respect and there is a shared sense of purpose across the school. Many pupils enjoy school, staff collaborate well towards common goals, and there are positive working relationships between staff and pupils.

The school provides an inclusive environment. Pupils with additional learning needs are supported particularly well. Nearly all pupils with statements of special educational need are integrated well into mainstream classes and play a full part in the life of the school.

Where teaching is effective, pupils make strong progress. However, pupils' achievement and progress are too variable across key performance indicators and subjects.

Leaders have had a positive impact in a few areas of the school's work, such as improving standards in mathematics, the provision for pupils with additional learning needs, and managing the school's budget efficiently. However, leaders have not had sufficient impact on developing teaching, raising standards overall, and improving pupils' attendance.

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	**Adequate and needs improvement**
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	**Adequate and needs improvement**
Teaching and learning experiences	**Adequate and needs improvement**
Care, support and guidance	**Good**
Leadership and management	**Adequate and needs improvement**

Recommendations

R1 Raise standards, particularly at key stage 4, including those of the more able

R2 Improve attendance

R3 Strengthen the quality of teaching to improve the progress that pupils make in lessons

R4 Improve the quality and impact of self-evaluation and improvement planning

What happens next

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

Main findings

Standards: Adequate and needs improvement

A majority of pupils make suitable progress in developing their knowledge, skills and understanding during lessons. They recall previous learning reasonably well. In a few lessons, where teaching is particularly effective, many pupils make strong progress. In a similar proportion of lessons, more able pupils make very strong progress. They apply knowledge and skills that they have acquired successfully to new and challenging contexts. However, a minority of pupils do not make secure enough progress in their learning. They do not remember key information well enough, do not have sufficient skills to tackle new tasks, and struggle to grasp ideas.

Many pupils listen carefully to their teachers and their peers. In a few lessons, they provide extended verbal responses to teachers' questions and use subject specific vocabulary accurately. In information technology, for example, many pupils communicate their understanding of complex computer science concepts such as sequencing and iteration with confidence. More able pupils are particularly articulate speakers, and express well-considered opinions and ideas. For example, in mathematics, a few can explain fluently the effects that rotation and enlargement would have on the transformation of a shape. However, overall, a majority of pupils do not discuss what they are learning often enough and, as a result, do not improve their speaking skills in a range of contexts. A minority of pupils are reluctant to talk, and provide limited verbal responses.

Many pupils read aloud with suitable expression and confidence. A majority of pupils use a suitable range of reading strategies to support their learning. They can skim and scan a range of texts to extract useful information, and a few pupils apply the skills of inference and deduction well. For example, in media lessons, pupils analyse messages conveyed through imagery with skill and sensitivity, and language in magazines. In a minority of subjects, pupils suitably write extended pieces for a wide range of purposes. A majority of pupils organise their work successfully, use an appropriate range of vocabulary, and express their ideas clearly. More able pupils apply a variety of writing styles to different tasks and contexts. However, the writing of a few pupils is presented poorly and lacks detail, accuracy and depth. A minority of pupils make frequent errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

In mathematics, many pupils demonstrate sound number skills, and the more able have a high level of numerical ability. In a few other relevant subjects, a majority of pupils develop their numeracy skills well. In science, they collect, interpret, analyse and present data suitably to support their learning. In geography, pupils draw accurate graphs, for example to plot rainfall in the Savanna grasslands of Africa to identify patterns between temperature and rainfall. However, a minority of pupils do not apply their numeracy skills well enough across the curriculum.

Many pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) applications effectively to support the development of their work. At key stage 3, many pupils apply their skills in a range of applications and contexts across the curriculum. A few pupils in design technology use computer aided design programmes to design prototypes successfully. Many pupils studying photography at key stage 4 use design software competently to produce a high standard of work.

Many pupils develop their creative skills effectively in a few subjects. For example, in music, a majority of pupils are confident performers, and apply their musical and organisational skills with dexterity to perform a contemporary pop song. In other subjects, a very few pupils make creative and perceptive connections, for example in French, linking grammatical structures such as 'Ca va' and 'c'est', or in ICT where a very few pupils predict confidently what will happen as a result of changes to their programming code.

Many pupils develop their physical skills well, such as in physical education lessons when they work successfully in pairs and groups to attempt a range of individual and group balances.

Over the last three years, pupils' performance in the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics has been close to levels in similar schools. Although performance in the capped points score has improved slightly over the same period, it remains below the average for pupils in similar schools. The proportion of pupils gaining five GCSE or equivalent grades at A*-A has fluctuated in recent years, and in 2018 it is just below the average for similar schools.

Pupils' performance in mathematics at key stage 4 has improved notably over the last three years. In 2018, pupils' performance in this indicator is much better than the average for similar schools. However, pupils' performance in other subjects, including the non-core subjects, is too variable.

The performance of both boys and girls at key stage 4 has been below the average for boys and girls in similar schools in many indicators in recent years.

The performance of pupils eligible for free school meals in the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics has improved in the last few years. However, overall, the performance of these pupils has varied too much over recent years. In 2018, their performance in many indicators is below the average for their counterparts in similar schools.

Pupils with additional learning needs perform well in line with their abilities.

At the end of Year 11, nearly all pupils remain in full time education.

Pupils' progress in developing their Welsh language skills is a strength of the school and many key stage 4 pupils gain a level 2 qualification in Welsh. In their Welsh lessons, pupils have a sound grasp of vocabulary and develop their verbal skills confidently. They also make suitable progress in extending their writing, for example to express personal information and preferences about a range of familiar topics.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Adequate and needs improvement

Many pupils feel safe and valued, and enjoy their life at school. They show respect towards one another, to staff and to visitors. Most understand the range of support and guidance available to them, and appreciate the positive and supportive relationships they have with their teachers and support staff. A majority of pupils feel the school deals fairly with instances of bullying.

Many pupils understand the contribution that a sensible diet and participation in healthy activities make to their wellbeing. They participate in a broad range of sports activities, including jiu-jitsu, circuit training and netball and in suitable extra-curricular activities, such as school productions. Many pupils support a range of charitable activities enthusiastically, for example the Animal Protection League, Nightingale House, Children in Need and Sports Relief. Pupils engaged in the Prince's Trust annually hold a cake sale to support autism awareness.

A minority of pupils develop their leadership skills well, for example by becoming school prefects, subject ambassadors, Year 10 peer mentors and members of the school council. However, the role of the school council is not fully understood by all pupils and it does not influence whole-school decisions well enough.

Many pupils behave well around the school, arrive on time to lessons and settle quickly to work. Many have positive attitudes to learning and show enthusiasm for their work. They work purposefully and productively in small groups, for example when identifying and explaining propaganda techniques used during the First World War. Pupils develop their independent learning skills effectively in a minority of lessons. However, a few pupils lack tenacity and resilience when tackling their work and allow their concentration to drift. In a few instances, there are notable amounts of missing, incomplete or poorly presented work in pupils' books. In a few lessons, a few pupils do not show respect and disrupt the learning of others.

Many pupils value the rewards scheme aimed at promoting positive attitudes to learning and proudly wear badges earned for consistently high attendance. However, whole-school rates of attendance have not compared well with those in similar schools over recent years. This has a negative impact on pupils' progress and attainment. The number of fixed-term exclusions has increased and is high.

Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement

Most teachers build positive relationships with their pupils. They create a supportive working environment and an atmosphere of trust.

A few teachers use imaginative and effective teaching strategies. These teachers are clear about what they intend pupils to learn. They use their subject expertise deftly to design stimulating and engaging ways to help pupils achieve their learning goals successfully.

Many teachers have a comprehensive knowledge of their subject. They produce a wide range of suitable learning resources that support key learning points and help pupils to develop their learning suitably.

A majority of teachers are effective communicators. They are good language models and are exacting in their insistence on subject specific vocabulary. These teachers provide clear instructions and explanations that help pupils to understand their learning objectives. They know their pupils well and provide support that is appropriate to their needs and abilities. They plan well-structured lessons, establish clearly understood routines and facilitate smooth transitions between learning tasks to create a suitable pace to learning. They model expected responses effectively, identifying clear success criteria, for example the specific requirements for GCSE.

However, in a minority of lessons the learning is over-directed by the teacher, and pupils are not given enough opportunities to think for themselves, discover new knowledge, or to learn independently. These teachers do not engage all pupils effectively. They do not plan well enough for the different needs and abilities of the pupils in their classes. This means that, in these lessons, work is not suitably challenging for all pupils and they do not make sufficient progress.

A few teachers are unclear about the learning that they expect pupils to achieve in the lesson. They do not plan the most suitable learning and teaching strategies. In these lessons, pupils' progress is too slow.

A common shortcoming is in teachers' questioning skills. Around half of teachers do not use a broad enough range of questions to probe pupils' understanding or to enable them to develop their thinking, for example through hypothesising and predicting, or by making connections to other learning. Only a minority of teachers stimulate debate and discussion often enough. As a result, in a majority of subjects, pupils make limited progress in their thinking and their speaking skills.

Many teachers use an appropriate range of assessment strategies and a majority provide beneficial opportunities for pupils to reflect on their work. They check pupils' progress regularly in class, providing useful feedback and support. A minority draw well upon assessment information to plan effectively for pupils' progress. However, a minority of teachers do not check pupils' understanding well enough.

Many teachers undertake valuable in-depth assessment of key pieces of pupils' work at regular intervals. A majority of teachers correct pupils' literacy errors helpfully. However, there is too much variation in the quality of formative comments that teachers make on pupils' work, and in teachers' expectations of pupils' responses. As a result, in a minority of cases, pupils do not improve their work effectively.

The school offers a curriculum that meets the needs of most pupils and builds successfully upon prior learning. At key stage 4, the curriculum offer includes a beneficial range of academic and vocational courses, which caters well for pupils' interests and abilities. The collaborative provision with a nearby college is a particular strength, allowing pupils to obtain qualifications in subjects such as small animal care, engineering, and hair and beauty. The school works equally creatively to improve learning opportunities for those pupils identified as having additional learning needs and provides bespoke programmes of study for these pupils.

The school provides a variety of experiences outside of the classroom that enhance the curriculum, such as visits abroad, participation in sporting events and the Duke of Edinburgh Award. There is also a valuable programme for more able pupils that supports those pupils planning entry to leading universities.

The plans for the development of literacy and numeracy across the school are largely appropriate. In a majority of curriculum areas, there are valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their skills. In particular, the Skills Challenge Certificate provision supports pupils to communicate effectively, to work with others, and to self-reflect. School leaders use national test data well to identify and plan effective interventions for those pupils with weaker skills. There are also beneficial opportunities for pupils to read for pleasure and to practise their numeracy skills in form time. However,

overall, the progressive development of pupils' skills is inconsistent across the school. There is too much variation in how effectively pupils develop their literacy, in particular their oracy skills, across the curriculum. The school has planned valuable activities to support pupils' ICT skills, although this is in at an early stage of development.

The school offers beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop their appreciation of Welsh heritage and culture, such as the annual Eisteddfod and residential courses at Glanllyn. The school plans for a suitable range of topics related to Wales in curriculum areas.

Care, support and guidance: Good

Darland High School is a caring learning community that promotes inclusivity and wellbeing successfully.

There are appropriate systems to track and monitor the progress and wellbeing of all pupils, although some of these are in the early stages of development. Staff use this information appropriately to identify pupils who require additional support. However, tracking and monitoring has not had sufficient impact on pupils' attendance and the standards they achieve.

Parents are well-informed about their children's progress through a new reporting system and valuable activities such as a parents' forum. The school works appropriately with parents to address issues that may be affecting their child's learning, and to help parents to provide extra support for them.

The school provides a highly-structured nurturing environment for those pupils that need additional support in their learning. Specific interventions such as 'Talk About' contribute well to improving pupils' social, behavioural and communication skills.

There is comprehensive and well-designed provision for pupils with additional learning needs. Helpful individual education plans assist staff to meet the needs of these pupils suitably. Worthwhile use is made of 'person centred' approach to plan specific support for students with a range of additional learning needs. For example, interventions help to ensure that many pupils make good progress in reading comprehension and spelling. Nearly all pupils with statements of special educational need are integrated well into mainstream lessons and this reflects the school's inclusive approach. Overall, the support for pupils with additional learning needs helps them to make strong progress and achieve well.

The school makes effective use of a broad range of professional support including external agencies such as educational psychologists and mental health teams. This specialist assistance contributes well to vulnerable pupils' wellbeing and learning. The pastoral team provides a wide range of useful additional support including access to learning coaches, counsellors and a range of support staff.

The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development appropriately, for example through wellbeing days and visits from a range of specialist outside providers. The personal, social and health education programme contributes well to pupils' understanding of the importance of tolerance and respect

for others. This programme encourages pupils to reflect appropriately on their personal values and responsibilities. However, the school does not make the most effective use of form time to develop personal, social and learning skills.

There are suitable arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. These help pupils to understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle and how their choices will impact on their present and future wellbeing. There is a wide range of educational visits and extra-curricular activities, including valuable opportunities for pupils to take part in sporting and recreational clubs, which enhances pupils' experiences in school. The school promotes a significant number of charity events in which many pupils participate, such as 'Making a Difference Day', and an annual sponsored walk for charity that includes all staff and students. These activities contribute well to the development of pupils' empathy and understanding of social and ethical issues.

There are well-planned transition arrangements with partner primary schools. These help most pupils to settle successfully at the school.

The school provides suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their leadership skills and to contribute to decision making. However, pupils are not always aware of the impact of their suggestions. High levels of participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme develop pupils' team-work and leadership skills, and are a strength in the school.

The school provides helpful guidance and advice to pupils relating to subject options, educational pathways and future career choices. This guidance assists pupils to make informed choices about their future and in preparing them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management: Adequate and needs improvement

The headteacher and senior leadership team have developed an appropriate vision for the school based on enabling pupils to become ambitious, happy and confident learners. This vision is captured in the school's motto 'Aspire, Apply, Achieve' and is shared and understood well by the school's community. Senior leaders have created a supportive and caring ethos where staff are committed to the school and work well together.

Leaders have clear and well understood roles and responsibilities. The school has a suitable line-management structure with regular, timetabled meetings. These meetings address appropriately issues relating to standards and the monitoring of pupils' progress. Senior leaders hold staff to account suitably and deal appropriately with aspects of underperformance. Performance management arrangements are appropriate and objectives align suitably with school and faculty priorities. However, a minority of these objectives do not focus sharply enough on pupil progress.

Overall, the majority of middle leaders have an appropriate knowledge of standards in their areas of responsibility. A minority are particularly effective leaders who have been successful in raising and sustaining high standards. However, there is too much variability in the effectiveness of middle leaders.

Governors are enthusiastic and supportive of the school. They have established useful committees which focus well on standards of achievement, wellbeing and finance. Their roles as link governors allow them to have an appropriate understanding of the school's main strengths and areas for improvement. They have provided suitable challenge on issues such as extending the range of extra-curricular opportunities and improving the effectiveness of teaching assistants. However, the clarity of information provided to governors has not allowed them to challenge the school well enough.

Effective leadership and successful self-evaluation and improvement planning have had a positive impact on important aspects of the school's work, such as improving standards in mathematics, the provision for additional learning needs and resolving the school's budget deficit position. However, leadership at all levels has not had sufficient impact on other significant aspects such as the quality of teaching, pupils' attendance and the standards they achieve. Many of the recommendations from the school's previous inspection report remain aspects in need of improvement.

Leaders at all levels analyse an appropriate range of data. Their review of performance based on data analysis is generally appropriate, though it is not always evaluated in a broad enough context. Faculty leaders focus helpfully on specific aspects of pupils' performance in tests and examinations. A minority of these leaders analyse data well but a few are over-generous in their evaluations and tend to make excuses for weak performance.

The school has suitable systems to gather evidence and to involve a range of stakeholders in self-evaluation processes. Leaders regularly complete beneficial activities such as lesson observations, learning walks, scrutiny of pupils' books and gaining pupil and parental views. However, leaders do not focus sufficiently on pupils' standards, progress and skills when observing lessons and scrutinising work. As a result, they do not evaluate the quality of teaching by its impact on standards, well enough.

Through suitable self-evaluation processes, senior leaders have identified appropriately most of the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, the links between the school's self-evaluation findings and subsequent improvement planning are not clear enough. Improvement planning to address important aspects such as the quality of teaching and attendance is not based on a thorough enough understanding of the underlying causes for underperformance and, as a result, is not sufficiently strategic. Pastoral leaders do not self-evaluate or plan for improvement systematically enough.

The school provides valuable professional learning opportunities for staff with leadership responsibilities to develop their leadership skills. This includes external programmes and mentoring through the link meeting structure. There are beneficial opportunities for all staff to share teaching ideas and practice through the peer observation programme, Friday briefings and INSET sessions. However, the school's systems to improve teaching through professional learning are not sufficiently strategic. Furthermore, leaders do not evaluate the impact of professional learning activities well enough.

The school manages its financial resources efficiently. Leaders deploy staff appropriately to deliver the curriculum. The school directs its funding towards beneficial strategies for the school. Overall, the school uses the pupil development grant suitably, and this funding is used to support pupils in important areas. However, this has not had a sustained enough impact on the attendance or outcomes for pupils eligible for free school meals.

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

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

Excellent	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
Adequate and needs improvement	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement	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:

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