

A report on

St David's High School

**St David's Terrace
Saltney
Chester
Flintshire
CH4 0AE**

Date of inspection: May 2025

by

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

About St David's High School

Name of provider	St David's High School
Local authority	Flintshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	343
Pupils of statutory school age	341
Number in sixth form	N/A
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 21.1%)	35.2%
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 11.2%)	10.9%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	2.6%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2021
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/12/2016
Start date of inspection	13/05/2025

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.

Summary

St David's High School is an inclusive caring community with a clear focus on equity and supporting pupils' well-being. Pupils benefit from a broad range of support and most feel safe at school and know where to seek support if needed. Staff know their pupils well.

The majority of teachers establish effective classroom routines and offer pupils suitable learning activities. In a very few lessons, pupils make strong progress, and teachers include skilfully planned activities that capture pupils' imagination and use probing questions that encourage independent thinking. In a significant minority of cases, there are shortcomings in teaching that mean pupils make limited progress and often become passive in their learning. Too often, teachers accept brief and underdeveloped verbal responses to questions and these lessons lack challenge. A few pupils display negative attitudes towards learning, talking over the teacher and failing to listen respectfully.

The school has recognised the importance of improving pupils' writing skills and made it a whole-school priority. Overall, opportunities for extended writing are purposeful. However, the school's provision for developing pupils' speaking and advanced reading skills is underdeveloped. More than a half of pupils have weak numeracy skills, and they do not receive enough opportunities to develop these skills in mathematics and other relevant subjects. Too often, numeracy tasks lack sufficient challenge, limiting pupils' skill development. In addition, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh-speaking skills in lessons and across the school.

The headteacher has developed a strong sense of teamwork amongst staff and considers pupil and staff well-being carefully. Although leaders work well together, there is a lack of clear, strategic leadership and they do not hold staff to account fully. They do not have a sufficiently rigorous approach to gathering evidence from activities such as learning walks and book reviews and are therefore unable to plan for improvement effectively. While leadership has had a positive impact on communication with parents and pupils' well-being, it has not had enough impact on the quality of teaching, the development of pupils' skills and curriculum design.

Recommendations

We have made six recommendations to help the school continue to improve:

- R1. Strengthen leadership to ensure that leaders at all levels are able to carry out their roles more strategically and be held to account for securing improvement
- R2. Strengthen self-evaluation processes so that leaders have an accurate view of the school's areas for development and plan for improvement precisely
- R3. Improve the quality of teaching
- R4. Improve provision to develop pupils' numeracy skills progressively
- R5. Increase opportunities for pupils to practise and develop their speaking, advanced reading and Welsh language skills across the curriculum
- R6. Strengthen curriculum provision and strategic planning for the Curriculum for Wales, mathematics and Welsh

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. Estyn will monitor the school's progress usually every four to six months.

Main findings

Teaching and learning

Many teachers at St David's High School foster strong working relationships with their pupils. They know their pupils well and are very supportive of them. These teachers create a calm and purposeful learning environment and have secure subject knowledge.

In a majority of lessons, pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), make adequate progress in the development of their knowledge, understanding and skills. In these lessons, teachers plan sequences of helpful activities. They provide clear explanations of important concepts and helpful instructions that support pupils to engage in activities. They have appropriate expectations of their pupils and use questioning techniques suitably to check pupils' recall. These teachers monitor pupils' progress and address any errors or misconceptions. Where teaching assistants are in lessons, they provide useful and sensitive support to pupils.

In a very few lessons, where pupils make strong progress, they are often inspired by their teachers' enthusiasm. In these lessons, teachers ask incisive questions that probe pupils' understanding and simultaneously challenge them to develop their verbal responses.

In a significant minority of lessons, various shortcomings hinder pupils' progress. In these lessons, teachers:

- plan tasks that do not build logically on each other
- plan tasks that focus too much on what they want pupils to do rather than what they should learn
- do not use questioning well enough to develop learning and accept brief verbal responses

In these lessons, teachers give overly lengthy explanations that slow the pace of learning. This limits pupils' independence causing them to lose focus and engagement. There is often a lack of clarity around what is meant by challenge in lessons, especially for more able pupils. Teachers do not have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils can achieve. A few pupils display negative attitudes towards learning, occasionally talking over the teacher and failing to listen respectfully.

The school has focused on improving the quality of written feedback and, in a majority of instances, teachers provide useful advice to help pupils identify aspects of their work that require improving. As a result, pupils make the effort to refine their work appropriately. However, in a minority of cases, teachers' feedback is not always clear or precise enough to enable pupils to make purposeful improvements in their work.

Literacy and wider skills

The school is developing its provision to improve the quality of pupils' extended writing. It has focused on the use of connectives to help pupils to write with clarity and structure. This is beginning to have an effect on pupils' quality of writing. Although the school has started to prioritise opportunities to develop and improve pupils' speaking and advanced reading skills across the curriculum, these strategies are underdeveloped.

The majority of pupils listen carefully to their teachers' instructions and to the contributions of their peers. They engage suitably in class discussions. A few pupils offer well-developed responses and explain and justify their opinions. These pupils are articulate and use a wide range of vocabulary, for example when reflecting on why Priestley wants readers to think about responsibility in 'An Inspector Calls,' leading to a purposeful discussion on the impact of socialism. However, a minority of pupils provide only brief, underdeveloped verbal responses using a limited vocabulary. They are reluctant to contribute verbally and struggle to articulate themselves clearly. This is often because of the limitations of their vocabulary, poor listening skills, or shortcomings in teachers' questioning.

When given the opportunity, more able pupils convey meaning skilfully when reading out aloud independently and are willing to risk pronouncing and saying unfamiliar words. A minority of pupils try to vary their tone of voice effectively to align with the requirements of the reading passages in question. In general, a minority of pupils lack confidence in reading aloud.

Many pupils demonstrate a sound ability to identify basic implied meanings in texts and locate relevant information competently. They use inference and deduction skills at an appropriate level. In English, more able pupils show strong progress in their ability to infer, interpret, synthesise and evaluate complex texts successfully. In history, many pupils evaluate the reliability of sources successfully and show a sound understanding of bias. However, pupils do not develop their advanced reading skills well enough due to lack of opportunities across the curriculum.

The majority of pupils write at length with suitable accuracy, structure, and vocabulary. More able pupils produce detailed and well-organised work, using an extensive vocabulary. However, a minority of pupils make frequent spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors. They produce brief, underdeveloped pieces with limited vocabulary.

When opportunities arise, pupils develop their creative, thinking and physical skills well. For example, pupils use a coping saw appropriately to help create their keyring in product design. More able pupils generate sophisticated design ideas for print stickers in art. In

physical education lessons, many pupils demonstrate good hand-eye coordination skills when fielding in modified rounders games.

Cymraeg

In general, pupils do not make enough progress in their Welsh language skills over time. In reading activities, the majority of pupils are able to identify basic key details in texts. However, only a very few communicate and converse suitably in the language. Most lack confidence to communicate orally and make basic errors in pronunciation. This is because there are insufficient opportunities for the development of pupils' Welsh language skills and promotion of the status of the Welsh language across the school.

Numeracy

Leaders have helpfully mapped the opportunities for pupils to practise numeracy skills across the curriculum. They have sensibly prioritised support for numeracy-rich subjects, which has led to some adaptations to tasks in geography and technology. Helpful 'How to' guides for staff have been produced to support implementation, although leaders have not evaluated the impact of this on pupils' learning. However, the planning for the progressive development of numeracy across subjects is underdeveloped.

Around half of pupils have at least suitable basic number skills, while more able pupils apply their skills well in different contexts. However, around half of pupils struggle with basic number work, which hinders their ability to apply their understanding to solve more complex problems. In mathematics, around half of pupils demonstrate secure understanding of number but have limited experiences in other key areas such as measures, shape and space, and data, restricting their overall progress.

In other subjects, pupils apply their numeracy skills with varying success. For example, in science, they substitute values into simple formulae. Their graphs are often plotted carelessly, and errors go unchecked by teachers. Pupils do not analyse or draw conclusions from graphs well enough. Too often, numeracy tasks are insufficiently challenging and are superficial, adding little value to subject learning. As a result, progress in numeracy across the curriculum is limited.

Digital Skills

Planning for the progressive development of digital skills across the curriculum is underdeveloped. In information and communication technology (ICT) lessons, pupils develop their digital skills suitably through activities such as app design, coding, data visualisation and vector graphics. In music, pupils develop their digital skills suitably by recording their own musical performances and embedding their videos into presentations. However, in general, opportunities for pupils to develop digital skills are limited.

Curriculum

The school has articulated a clear vision for its curriculum based on the overarching approach of themed 'Big Questions'. In line with this vision, staff within areas of learning and experience (AOLE) have collaboratively trialled, adapted and developed their schemes of work. However, there remains variability in the quality of the design and implementation of these new approaches across subject areas. In addition, leaders have not evaluated how well these revisions lead to more authentic and meaningful learning experiences for all pupils.

The curriculum offer at Key Stage 4 meets the needs of most pupils. The school provides a suitable range of general and vocational qualifications, including hair and beauty, motor vehicle engineering, and health and social care. These options reflect pupils' interests and support their aspirations suitably. However, due to financial constraints, a few of these courses do not proceed as planned and, as a result, a very few pupils are unable to pursue their preferred options.

Currently, many pupils in Year 9 undertake an external qualification in finance as part of their mathematics curriculum. This adversely impacts teachers' ability to deliver a broad and balanced mathematics curriculum with a suitable level of challenge, and limits opportunities for pupils to deepen their understanding across the full breadth of mathematical concepts.

Staff provide valuable guidance to pupils and parents regarding choosing options in Year 9 and pupils benefit from careers education and preparation for the world of work, delivered through personal and social education (PSE) sessions. This programme supports pupils' social, moral, and cultural development through an appropriate range of topics, for example bullying and healthy relationships. In a few instances, leaders refine this provision using pupil feedback, as well as responding to local themes. Where appropriate, external partners and businesses contribute meaningfully to this work. The school offers a suitable variety of curriculum enrichment activities, including drama and music clubs and educational visits.

Pupils' understanding of cultural diversity, equity, and the experiences of Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities is developed suitably through subject lessons and pupils' participation in events such 'Flintshire Pride'.

Well-being, care, support and guidance

St David's High School has a caring community ethos, which is valued by staff, pupils, parents and governors. Staff are dedicated to getting to know the pupils well so that they can support their well-being appropriately. This helps most pupils to feel safe, cared for and looked after. They feel respected by staff, know whom to turn to if they require

support, and feel confident that their teachers will help them to look after their mental health and well-being.

Many teachers make appropriate use of the school's behaviour policy to manage learning and support positive behaviour in their classrooms and around the school. Leaders respond sensitively to the few instances of bullying and most pupils are positive about how well such incidents are resolved by staff.

The 'NET' (Non-Exclusion Teaching) provision has been recently introduced to support teachers and pupils in managing pupils' behaviour. As a result, the school has seen an improvement in pupils' behaviour. However, in the few lessons where teachers do not manage behaviour well enough, a few pupils disrupt the learning of others. Pastoral middle leaders regularly monitor pupils' behaviour, but limited evaluation is undertaken to understand the impact of the schools' strategies on improving pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning.

Many pupils appreciate the developing rewards system in school, which is evolving purposefully as a result of pupil voice. Pupils are given a range of opportunities to impact on decisions made in school through curriculum surveys, which has led to, for example, the introduction of extra-curricular dodgeball and badminton. In addition, pupils value the school's 'suggestion box', where they can express their opinions. A few represent their peers' views as a member of 'The Senedd'. Whilst these pupils value such opportunities, there is limited scope for all pupils to develop their leadership skills fully and be autonomous and independent in these roles.

The school develops pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding suitably. During form time and assemblies, pupils benefit from engaging in suitable opportunities to talk about important agendas such as anti-bullying, healthy living and human rights. However, resources are generalised across all year groups, and this limits the impact of this work. Many pupils benefit from the broad range of partnerships in which the school engages to further their personal, social and emotional development. For example, links with a local football academy have enabled a few pupils to make use of updated sports equipment to support them in their physical development.

Valuable transition arrangements are in place to enable primary-aged pupils to engage in numerous, bespoke 'AOLE days' throughout Year 6. This helps pupils settle quickly and feel confident as they move into secondary school. The school also offers a series of induction activities, including transition days and parent meetings, which help to familiarise pupils with the school environment.

Leaders have developed a secure understanding of and appropriate provision for the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018. The additional

learning needs (ALN) team know the pupils well and work purposefully to help them overcome barriers to learning. Pupils with ALN have helpful individual development plans (IDPs) and useful one-page profiles (OPP) that are shared with all staff. These provide beneficial guidance for how best to support pupils. However, teachers do not always make effective use of this information when planning lessons. This means that they do not always adapt their teaching well enough to meet the specific needs of pupils with ALN.

The school has introduced a range of suitable interventions to support pupils' literacy, numeracy and social development needs. The 'NEST' provision provides effective support for vulnerable pupils and those who require a more nurturing setting. Bespoke approaches such as art therapy are also used appropriately to meet the needs of pupils and support their achievement.

Last year, attendance was above the national average and that of similar schools; however, it remained slightly below pre-pandemic levels. The attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals was also above the average for similar schools and nationally in 2023-2024. Persistent absence decreased last year, but pupils absent for 10% or more, is higher than the average for similar schools and nationally. The school has strengthened its focus on improving attendance through increasing the staffing capacity, introducing the NEST facility and offering support from the school-based counsellor. These strategies provide appropriate support for all pupils, particularly those who are anxious about attending school.

Although there have been improvements in pupils' attendance, leaders do not evaluate the impact of attendance strategies consistently or in sufficient detail. As a result, they are unable to identify clearly the reasons for improved attendance or use the information to refine their strategic planning effectively.

Safeguarding processes are clearly established and well communicated. All staff and governors receive relevant training at an appropriate level, which ensures that they have a secure understanding of their roles in keeping pupils safe. Staff are confident in applying the school's safeguarding policies and procedures and know how to record and share concerns appropriately. Over time, the school has enhanced site security by implementing a range of control measures, including the installation of new fencing, limiting pedestrian access to the site, and increasing CCTV coverage.

Leading and improving

The headteacher is a committed and supportive leader. He has a clear vision for the school, which is well understood by staff. He is supported by a team of dedicated leaders who work collaboratively to meet the needs of pupils. Their roles and responsibilities are distributed appropriately. However, the time allocated to leaders to carry out their roles is

not sufficient to allow them to prioritise their strategic work. Overall, leadership has had not had sufficient impact on some important aspects of the school's work. As a result, there are significant shortcomings in, for example, teaching, curriculum and the development of pupils' skills.

Senior leaders carry out a suitable analysis of performance data and identify strengths along with a few important areas for development. They also draw on their internal tracking systems to appropriately inform their dialogue with middle leaders and the governing body. However, leaders do not gather a sufficient range of robust, first-hand evidence about the impact of teaching on pupil progress, and do not triangulate their findings from various evaluation activities well enough. As a result, self-evaluation processes do not enable leaders to identify strengths or areas for improvement clearly or with sufficient precision. In addition, leaders do not evaluate the impact of leadership and professional learning on teaching. As a consequence, leaders hold an overly positive view of leadership, provision and pupils' learning and progress.

The school's improvement priorities, in general, are suitably focused on national priorities. Appropriate professional learning is in place to help staff contribute to these priorities. Despite this, leaders do not identify with sufficient clarity exactly what needs to improve, or what the most pressing issues are. For example, they have not recognised well enough important weaknesses in the school's curriculum, the provision to support the progressive development of numeracy skills, or specific aspects of teaching that need significant improvement.

There are suitable processes in place for leaders to hold staff to account for the quality of their work. However, due to a lack of rigour, leaders do not sufficiently hold staff to account well enough. Overall, the distinctions between accountability, quality assurance and self-evaluation are not sufficiently clear.

Governors are supportive and committed members of the school. They have suitable knowledge of the school's work. On occasions, they provide appropriate challenge to leaders. However, they do not evaluate their own effectiveness or the impact of their work.

The school has a deficit budget, which has been agreed by the local authority. There are suitable processes in place to plan and monitor the budget.

Leaders employ a range of suitable strategies to reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment and well-being. For example, the school provides pupils from low-income households with a uniform assistance programme and individual mentoring. The school makes suitable use of the pupil development grant (PDG). However, leaders do not evaluate thoroughly enough the impact of the grant on pupil outcomes.

Leaders give strong consideration to staff well-being. As a result, most staff feel trusted and supported. The school prioritises positive relationships with both parents and the local community. As a result, many parents feel that the school provides information in a clear and timely manner and responds well to issues.

Additional information

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not give any cause for concern

The school's arrangements for site management do not give any cause for concern

The school has appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking

Leaders and governors monitor the school's budget appropriately. The deficit budget has been agreed by the local authority.

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

Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. '*most pupils...*' or '*very few pupils...*'. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

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 publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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