

A report on

St Michael's School

**Bryn
Llanelli
Carmarthenshire
SA14 9TU**

Date of inspection: June 2025

by

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

About St Michael's School

Name of provider	St Michael's School
Proprietor status	Private limited company
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent all age
Residential provision?	Yes
Number of pupils on roll	425
Pupils of statutory school age	302
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	{PreviousInspectionDate}
Start date of inspection	18/06/2025

School context:

St Michael's School is a co-educational day and boarding school for pupils from the age of 4 to 18 years, situated in the village of Bryn, east of Llanelli in Carmarthenshire. The school is owned by CGS UK Holdings Limited, trading as CATS Global Schools.

There are currently 425 pupils in the school. These include 92 in the preparatory school, of whom 13 are in the nursery class, and 333 in the senior school, of whom 110 are in the sixth form. In the senior school and sixth form, 55 pupils are resident at the school as boarders.

The headteacher was appointed in September 2017, and the school's last core inspection was in May 2022.

Summary

St Michael's School fosters a culture of high academic achievement, mutual respect, and strong community spirit. Nearly all pupils feel safe and happy at school and appreciate the small class sizes and highly supportive teaching. A shared culture of ambition and high expectations is evident throughout the school, where learning occurs in a calm, respectful environment. From the early years upwards, nearly all pupils demonstrate attentiveness and confidence, engaging actively in lessons that foster speaking and writing skills highly effectively. Cross-curricular activities, such as linking geography with art, promote creativity and the application of subject knowledge.

Outdoor learning is a key part of the prep school experience, with younger pupils participating in imaginative, forest school-style activities and older pupils developing resilience through residential challenges. In the senior school, nearly all pupils are consistently engaged and motivated, producing high-quality work, particularly in writing and mathematics. Nearly all teachers make highly effective use of strong subject knowledge and questioning techniques to guide pupils through challenging tasks, including GCSE-style assessments in Key Stage 3.

Nearly all older pupils show independence in learning, for example in computing and science lessons, where they apply complex concepts successfully and provide constructive feedback to their peers. Many Year 12 pupils demonstrate highly developed critical thinking and perseverance, actively seeking to develop their understanding and reflecting on their work to improve it.

Governance has improved significantly since the last inspection, with a new board composed of experienced professionals ensuring regulatory compliance and providing robust strategic oversight. This includes effective critical friendship regarding the school's culture of safeguarding, and collaboration among school leaders across the CATS Global Schools network. A local advisory panel adds valuable community insight and local context.

A revamped PSHE curriculum now spans all age groups, emphasising key themes such as health, wellbeing, democracy, and the rule of law. Engaging lessons, external partnerships, and reflective tools enrich pupils' understanding, ensuring that topics like mental health and personal safety are effectively reinforced.

Compliance with the regulations for registration

Independent school inspections are governed by the Education Act 2002 and related regulations: the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024. These regulations require an independent school to meet an appropriate standard in the following areas:

The quality of education provided by the school

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The suitability of proprietors and staff

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The provision of information

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The manner in which complaints are to be handled

On the basis of this visit, there is no evidence that the school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Recommendations

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

- R1. Continue to work towards the few improvement priorities identified by leaders, including a renewed focusing of quality assurance work on pupil outcomes

What happens next

Estyn advises the proprietor to amend its current development plan to show what actions the school intends to take in response to the recommendations. It is also advisable to circulate this plan, or a summary of it, to all parents/carers at the school.

Main evaluation

Pupils at St Michael's School are focused on and committed to attaining their very best. Nearly all are proud of their school and of its diverse community. They appreciate the extensive support received from their teachers, and the small classes they are taught in. Pupils feel happy, safe and secure in a close knit, inclusive school community.

Nearly all teaching across the school is based on a shared culture of ambition and of high expectations of both staff and pupils. Learning takes place in a calm, purposeful environment characterised by mutual respect. There are well established class routines and the objectives in all lessons are clear. Teachers exhibit strong subject knowledge, especially in relation to the demands of public examinations. This knowledge strongly informs the planning for present and future learning. Open questioning techniques are used effectively to enable pupils to consider the next stage of their understanding without over directing their activity.

From an early age, pupils are highly attentive in lessons, respond well, and build upon the comments and feedback provided by their teachers and peers. Nearly all prep school pupils develop strong oral skills swiftly and are confident to speak to visitors. For example, pupils in Year 3 enthusiastically explain the three layers in a rainforest and Year 4/5 pupils discuss what they know about the difference between mountains and volcanoes.

In Year 4/5, pupils enthusiastically engage with a creative, cross-curricular task that explores the links between the 'Extreme Earth' geography topic and the work of the artist Stephanie Peters. A majority of pupils confidently use specialised vocabulary whilst annotating a work of art collaboratively. Furthermore, nearly all Year 5/6 pupils make productive use of specialist scientific terminology and feel confident explaining and utilising them to produce classifications of their favourite sweets using prior knowledge of biological classifications. Nearly all pupils are able to articulate what it is they are doing and connect it effectively to prior learning. Pupils have a clear sense of purpose throughout these activities and enjoy collaborating to produce creative, bespoke outcomes.

Learning through the outdoors is a key feature in the prep school. For example, the youngest pupils enthusiastically participate in a Forest School session where they respond to engaging tasks in response to messages sent from a visiting alien. Older preparatory pupils speak enthusiastically about the challenges they complete as 'young explorers' such as observing a sunrise or building a pebble tower. In addition, they have developed their physical skills by participating in residential course activity such as paddleboarding and archery.

Across the senior school, pupils are ambitious about their learning and approach lessons with consistently high levels of effort and engagement. Standards of writing are very high, with examples of detailed, accurate extended writing in English and French. Standards of presentation and reasoning, particularly in mathematics, are very high.

In Key Stage 3, pupils regularly encounter challenging GCSE style questions. For example, in history, a majority of Year 7 pupils respond accurately to examination style questions to describe medical treatments in the Middle Ages, including a synthesis of a wide range of sources. A notable feature is the exposure of pupils to success criteria and scaffolding, which enables nearly all pupils to develop a more secure understanding of the features of successful extended writing.

Nearly all Key Stage 4 pupils work highly effectively both independently and in small groups. For example, in Year 10 computer science, pupils work independently to solve problems using code. Nearly all Key Stage four pupils are adept at using their teachers' questions as cues to provide more detailed and accurate responses. In most lessons, instant, formative verbal feedback from teachers allows for prompt correction and improvement of work, with pupils challenged to develop their work independently.

By the time they reach the Sixth Form, nearly all pupils are proactive in seeking solutions to challenges encountered and collaborate effectively with their teachers. They adopt a positive mindset when faced with challenging new material. For example, Year 12 mathematics pupils display high levels of curiosity when starting a new topic on the modulus function and are confident to share their ideas and questions in discussion. They do not simply seek an answer but look for clarification regarding the process and mechanism to develop and deepen their understanding.

Progress in addressing recommendations from previous inspection

R1.Strengthen the role of the governing body to act as a critical friend of the school

In the time since the last inspection, the school has made significant progress in addressing this recommendation. A new governing body was convened in August 2022, consisting of two independent governors, four directors of CATS Global Schools, and the Heads of the group's schools. This body is responsible for: monitoring compliance with regulatory standards, auditing the quality of education at the school, and advising on long-term strategic direction.

The broad range of skills, knowledge and experience within the governing body enables them to act as highly effective critical friends for the school. This is especially true of the independent members of the board, whose highly relevant expertise provides school

leaders with a valuable source of authoritative, reflective and evaluative council. For example, the designated safeguarding governor has been highly effective in supporting the school's newly appointed DSP. They play an important, active role in keeping school practice up to date with national developments, acting as a valuable source of knowledge and advice regarding all aspects of safeguarding.

The governing body's work has a suitable balance between operational and strategic matters. As a result of regular, first-hand evidence gathering, alongside a well-established system for Heads to report to the board, governors have an accurate and detailed understanding of the work of the school and the effectiveness of its practice. The inclusion of Heads of all other group schools on the governing body provides valuable opportunities for sharing of best practice and for moderation. For example, Heads of partner schools are involved with the regular, on-site school audits conducted by governors.

In addition to the governing body, the school has also established a local advisory panel, consisting of suitably experienced professionals from the local community. This panel assists, supports and challenges school leaders, providing a valuable local perspective.

R2.Strengthen the provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE) across the school

Since the last inspection, the school has made significant progress in responding to this recommendation, implementing a new PSHE programme across the school.

In the prep school, appropriate PSHE topics are embedded into the curriculum and reinforced through vibrant displays, assemblies and activity undertaken by pupil leaders. As a result of effective planning, pupils' knowledge and understanding of PSHE themes is developed purposefully and progressively.

The specialist curriculum lead for PSHE coordinates and teaches a well-planned, engaging and age-appropriate scheme at all levels of the senior school. Shared weekly topics are focused on themes such as 'Living in the Wider World' and 'Health & Wellbeing'.

Effective, bespoke resources provide pupils with a PSHE 'roadmap' and regular opportunities for reflection and self-assessment following each topic. Specific reference is made to the UNCRC in schemes of work and embedded topics. Year 8 pupils are taught about the fundamentals of democracy and the rule of law through an engaging 'Island Project' task, which enables creative exploration of the topic through effective comparison of utopian ideas with the UK legal system.

Sixth Form pupils reflect on their positive engagement with age-specific PSHE seminars on road safety, pertinent elements of relationships and sex education (RSE) and budgeting at

university. Nearly all Sixth Form pupils feel that this is a valuable element of the school's provision.

PSHE lessons make effective use of external partners. For example, Carmarthen school's liaison officer assists with the delivery of workshops on important topics such as cyber bullying, drugs and alcohol abuse. Themes and core content delivered through the PSHE programme are shared directly with heads of year and form teachers to ensure effective triangulation of material and reinforcement of topics such as prioritising mental health and the dangers of vaping.

Evidence base of the report

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- meet the headteacher, governors/proprietor(s), leaders 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
- visit lessons and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning
- 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 had 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 (where appropriate), 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 163 of the Education Act 2002. The main purpose of inspection under this section is to report on compliance with the Independent Schools Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024. In schools that provide non-maintained nursery education, this report also satisfies the requirements of Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

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:

Publications Section
Estyn
Anchor Court, Keen Road
Cardiff
CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website:
<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/>