

A report on

Olchfa School

**Gower Road
Sketty
Swansea
SA2 7AB**

Date of inspection: September 2025

by

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

About Olchfa School

Name of provider	Olchfa School
Local authority	City and County of Swansea
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	1907
Pupils of statutory school age	1437
Number in sixth form	466
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%)	11.1%
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 11.2%)	4.5%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.8%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	3.8%
Lead partner for Initial teacher education	No
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2023
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	26/02/2018
Start date of inspection	22/09/2025

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

Olchfa School provides a nurturing and inclusive environment underpinned by strong relationships between staff and pupils. Generally, teachers have high expectations and use their subject expertise to support pupil progress effectively. In many lessons, teaching is well planned and there is a good balance between teacher instruction and independent learning. Where teaching is particularly strong, lessons are sequenced carefully, teacher questioning is probing and pupils make rapid progress. However, in a few instances, there are shortcomings in planning and teacher questioning which impacts on pupils' progress as they are not challenged enough.

The curriculum is broad, engaging and rooted in the school's vision of 'Cynefin', fostering a sense of belonging. Pupils benefit from worthwhile opportunities to develop their literacy, numeracy, digital and wider skills. Many pupils read widely and write with a secure standard of accuracy. In a few instances, there are limited opportunities for pupils to develop their advanced reading skills. Many pupils have sound number skills and they apply their mathematical knowledge effectively to solve problems. In a minority of instances, some pupils struggle with graph work. The promotion of the Welsh language, alongside authentic cultural experiences, is a strength. An array of extra-curricular activities and enrichment programmes support pupils' wider development effectively.

The school places well-being at its core. Programmes such as the 'CHAT' peer-mentoring scheme and the 'NEWID' hub provide valuable support. Sixth-form pupils make a valuable contribution to the life of the school and have mature social skills. Safeguarding arrangements are robust, positive behaviour is promoted effectively and incidents of bullying are rare. Attendance is improving, although this remains below pre-pandemic levels, particularly for pupils eligible for free school meals.

Provision for pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) is comprehensive, with well-planned interventions, enhanced transition arrangements and meaningful partnerships with external agencies in place. Pupils who attend the newly established specialist teaching facility say they feel safe and well supported.

Leaders are thoughtful and pro-active and governors provide effective support and challenge. National priorities, such as reducing the impact of poverty, are addressed effectively, with pupils eligible for free school meals achieving well. While leaders' self-evaluation is generally accurate, there are instances of overgenerous judgements of some aspects of teaching and pupils' attainment. Staff and leaders benefit from a range of valuable professional learning opportunities to continuously improve their practice.

Recommendations

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

- R1. Share the good practice in questioning to ensure that all teachers use questioning to deepen pupils' understanding and encourage them to explore their thinking.
- R2. Sharpen some aspects of self-evaluation and line management, so that leaders have a consistently detailed and fully accurate picture of all aspects of the school's work.

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection. Estyn will invite the school to prepare two case studies for dissemination on Estyn's website. One case study will focus on the school's 'i-Explore' curriculum and the other case study will outline how the school develops a sense of belonging and of the school within its community through its approach to 'Cynefin'.

Main findings

Teaching and learning

The positive working relationships between staff and pupils at Olchfa School are a notable feature. Most teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and engagement. As a result, most pupils are punctual to lessons, engage well with the work set and show positive attitudes to learning. Most teachers create a nurturing and productive learning environment. They are good language models and focus well on developing pupils' subject specific terminology.

In many instances, teaching is effective in ensuring that pupils, including pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), make secure progress in their knowledge, understanding and skills. These teachers plan lessons carefully to ensure that activities are suitably challenging. They explain concepts effectively and use basic questioning strategies appropriately to check for understanding. As a result, many pupils sustain their concentration well and display substantial resilience and an ability to work independently. Many teachers circulate the classroom to monitor pupils' progress, use information gathered to inform the pace of teaching and address any common misconceptions in a timely manner.

In the minority of instances where teaching is particularly effective, pupils make strong progress. In these lessons, teachers draw skilfully on pupils' prior knowledge and skills and use their expert subject knowledge to meticulously plan series of lessons. They break down the learning into incremental steps and provide pupils with a sequence of activities that grow increasingly challenging. The high-quality explanations and modelling they provide enable pupils to succeed independently with challenging tasks. A notable feature in these instances is the skilful use of questioning to probe pupils' thinking and further develop their oracy skills.

In a few lessons, shortcomings in teaching limit the progress that pupils make. These shortcomings include teachers not considering well enough what they want pupils to learn when planning, or not having high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve.

In general, the impact of feedback is too variable. In the best examples, teachers use assessment to identify what pupils do well and what aspects they need to improve. They provide precise advice about how pupils can improve their learning and ensure that pupils respond purposefully. However, feedback is not always sufficiently precise and teachers do not consistently ensure that it has a positive impact on pupils' learning. In addition, teachers do not always use questioning well enough to probe and deepen pupils' thinking.

Skills

Leaders ensure that opportunities for pupils to develop their skills are authentic. They have produced useful resources, such as the 'Olchfa Literacy Toolkit', to share examples of good practice. Leaders have worked productively with local primary schools and the areas of learning to ensure bespoke support in planning for the progressive development of pupils' skills. This includes a helpful focus on teaching methodologies.

Literacy

Most pupils listen well and respond suitably to their peers. The consistent whole-school approach to the teaching of vocabulary helps pupils to use a wide range of subject-specific terms in their verbal responses. Many pupils share their thoughts and ideas clearly, and a minority express themselves eloquently, expanding their answers and citing relevant examples to support the points they make in a sophisticated manner. A minority of pupils provide only brief verbal responses and this is often due to shortcomings in teachers' questioning.

The school has a strong focus on developing a culture which celebrates the joy of reading. This helps to boost pupils' attainment and supports them to develop as well-rounded, ethical and informed individuals. This is supported by a well-resourced library, peer reading buddies and age-appropriate reading recommendations lists which are shared with pupils and parents. Many pupils read for enjoyment, and use a wide range of reading strategies to support their learning. In lessons, this includes using inference to recognise the foibles of characters such as Romeo and articulating succinct overviews of both literary and non-literary texts. Many pupils synthesise information from a range of challenging texts effectively. More able pupils analyse language, character and theme in an assured and mature way. However, in a few instances, there are limited opportunities for pupils to develop their advanced reading skills.

Many pupils have secure writing skills and write well for different purposes and audiences across the curriculum. Generally, they use a broad vocabulary and structure their work effectively. These pupils write with suitable accuracy and clarity. A minority of pupils write with notable confidence and flair to engage the reader successfully, for example when writing an informal letter to their future selves. A few pupils make regular spelling errors, particularly with more complex words.

Numeracy

Within mathematics lessons, overall, there are good quality opportunities for pupils to develop their mathematics and numeracy skills. Across the curriculum, there are generally suitable opportunities for pupils to develop these skills, although they are not always planned well enough, particularly with regard to the teaching of graphs.

Many pupils have sound number skills and use the four rules accurately. They have a secure sense of number, as seen when they carry out mental estimates of calculations and consider the reasonableness of their answers. They are fluent in their use of fractions, percentages and decimals and can solve problems involving, for example, simple interest and repeated proportional changes. A substantial minority of pupils have strong mathematics and numeracy skills and have sound algebra skills. For example, they form and solve equations, rearrange complex formulae and make strong connections between algebraic and graphical representations of relationships.

Many pupils have a secure understanding of shapes and measures. They successfully calculate the volumes and surface areas of three-dimensional shapes. In their science lessons. They also use formulae confidently, for example, when calculating thinking, braking and stopping distances, showing a firm understanding of the factors that affect each of these. A similar proportion analyse data suitably. They use summary measures to compare different distributions and read and interpret graphs appropriately to help them inform their work. The majority draw statistical diagrams accurately and use these well to draw conclusions. For example, pupils use data to explore successfully how the UK's economy has changed over time. However, in a minority of instances, pupils do not plot graphs accurately enough or do not analyse their graphs to draw conclusions.

Digital

In general, pupils develop their digital skills well across the curriculum and use a range of software to achieve specific outcomes. For example, in Year 7 humanities, pupils use digital skills appropriately to extract and interpret relevant census data to support their understanding of their local area.

Thinking, creative and physical skills

There are many opportunities for pupils to develop their thinking skills. For example, many pupils demonstrate strong thinking and problem solving skills when attempting to break a code in the 'i-Explore' lessons. Pupils develop their creativity well. For example, in graphic communication they work well independently to research and produce art work in relation to aspects of youth culture. Nearly all pupils participate enthusiastically in physical activity.

Cymraeg

Leaders promote the advantages of learning the Welsh language well. Staff encourage pupils' use of the Welsh language outside of the classroom and the school is developing partnerships with external organisations, including the Urdd, to enhance pupils' experiences of Welsh language and culture. These valuable opportunities include residential visits to Llangrannog and being part of the 'Criw Cymraeg'. As a result, many

pupils have a positive attitude towards learning Welsh and, generally, they make secure progress in their language skills.

Many pupils pronounce basic Welsh words correctly when speaking and hold short conversations in Welsh in pairs or groups. When given the opportunity, pupils read sentences and short paragraphs aloud in a confident manner. Many pupils adapt their Welsh writing well to suit different audiences and purposes. However, a minority of pupils rely too heavily on resources such as word banks and sentence starters when answering questions verbally and in writing.

Sixth Form

Sixth form pupils are polite and welcoming to visitors, have positive attitudes to learning and contribute well during lessons. Most persevere well when faced with particularly challenging tasks. Many give articulate verbal responses during class discussions and, in some cases, ask teachers perceptive questions to deepen their understanding.

Curriculum

The school has established a clear and shared vision for its Curriculum for Wales, underpinned by a sense of 'Cynefin'. This encourages pupils to develop a strong sense of belonging and understand their place in the community and the wider world.

In Years 7 to 9, pupils follow the long established 'iLearn' curriculum that offers a broad and engaging programme of study. The curriculum is designed to connect learning to authentic experiences, helping pupils to see the relevance of their studies. In Year 9, pupils also choose from an extensive range of subjects such as music technology, sport leadership and French, to support their aspirations and interests. These enriching curriculum experiences are appreciated by the pupils and their parents. In addition, the school offers a valuable range of activities to broaden the horizons of its more able pupils. This includes participation in national competitions, debating training, trips to university open days and lectures from the local university.

Leaders consider pupils' views carefully to ensure that as many as possible study their chosen GCSE and A Level courses. The school provides a wide range of courses at Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, including general and vocational qualifications. The school's careers programme provides pupils with useful information when considering their next steps. For example, a school-based careers fair for Year 10 includes input from local employers, the school's alumni and universities.

The school provides a vibrant programme of extra-curricular activities, including graphics club, jazz club, the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and a wide variety of sports. Teachers also plan an array of useful educational visits and enrichment activities that

complement the curriculum. These experiences include trips to the Hay Festival, Cardiff Bay and Big Pit.

Pupils benefit from numerous opportunities to develop their understanding of equality and diversity. The history and experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities are explored through relevant curriculum experiences. For example, pupils explore cultural identity through a 'Map of Me' project and they consider the importance of poetry from different cultures in their English lessons. As part of the school's Culture Week, pupils celebrate diversity and their own identities through a number of activities such as the 'Wear to Share' day.

The school offers a valuable, bespoke programme of personal and social education that supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Through dedicated lessons, pupils learn about a range of important issues such as the effects of social media on mental health and personal effectiveness. They also explore relevant contemporary topics, including sustainability at Christmas, digital detox and discrimination. This provision is enhanced by a programme of external speakers who contribute positively to pupils' personal development in making appropriate lifestyle choices. Collectively, these experiences support pupils at Olchfa to develop a strong sense of self within the school.

Well-being, care, support and guidance

Olchfa School is a caring and inclusive community where senior leaders place a high priority on the well-being of pupils and staff. The school's core values of 'Ready, Respectful, Safe' permeate all aspects of its work and are reflected strongly in the courteous and considerate behaviour of pupils towards each other, staff and visitors. The positive relationships between staff and pupils contribute well to the supportive ethos across the school.

Arrangements for safeguarding and child protection are robust. Staff understand their responsibilities clearly and leaders ensure that all staff receive appropriate training. The school responds swiftly to any safeguarding concerns and works effectively with a range of external agencies to support vulnerable pupils. Leaders promote the wider culture of safeguarding purposefully, and the school supports pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development effectively through the well-planned PSHE programme, form time activities and assemblies. These provide valuable opportunities for pupils to develop a strong understanding of equality and diversity. Most pupils feel encouraged to respect all members of the community.

Pupil behaviour is managed consistently. The school's approach is linked firmly to its core values and places a clear emphasis on rewarding positive behaviours. Provision for the small number of pupils who find it difficult to access all aspects of the mainstream

curriculum, such as the 'Provision Group' and the 'Behaviour Support Unit', are effective and have a positive impact on reducing fixed-term exclusions. The NEWID hub offers a wide range of targeted interventions that support the well-being of vulnerable pupils particularly well. Incidents of bullying are rare and addressed swiftly. Most pupils report that they feel safe, are not bullied in school and that staff respond well to any concerns.

Pupils benefit from the school's strong links with external partners. These partnerships ensure timely access to specialist provision when needed. Leaders work closely with Careers Wales to ensure that pupils receive impartial advice when considering their next steps. The annual 'Well-being Fayre', organised by the emotional health and well-being pupil voice group, is a valuable event as it helps raise awareness of support available from charities and agencies in the local community.

Spotlight: CHAT mentoring programme

The CHAT (confidentiality, help, advice and trust) mentor programme is a successful peer mentoring approach to support pupils' well-being. Every year a small group of Year 10 pupils are appointed as CHAT mentors following a rigorous selection process. The successful candidates receive valuable training in how to deal with a range of well-being concerns. The CHAT team support pupils joining the school in Year 7 as part of the school's transition arrangements. All Year 7 form classes are allocated two CHAT mentors who are available during form periods to support pupils. The CHAT team also offers a lunchtime drop-in facility in the 'NEWID' well-being hub. The CHAT Mentor scheme is particularly valued by both mentors and mentees and is an integral part of the school's wider well-being support system

The school values pupils' views highly and provides a wide range of opportunities for pupils to develop their leadership skills. For example, pupils' views have played an important role in shaping the innovative 'i-Develop' programme. Staff, pupils, parents and carers collaborate effectively through the 'School Advisory Board' and ensure that leaders are aware of their views when making changes in the school.

Leaders monitor the attendance of individual pupils closely to identify those in need of specific interventions to improve their attendance. They work collaboratively with parents and carers to ensure pupils understand the importance of good attendance, and there is a worthwhile focus on celebrating improved and high attendance rates. Effective collaborative working between leaders and the wider pastoral team supports individual pupils and their families to improve their attendance. Rates of pupil attendance are improving although they remain below pre pandemic levels, particularly for those pupils eligible for free school meals.

The ALN (Additional Learning Needs) team is dedicated and passionate about providing the best experiences for pupils with ALN. The team has high expectations of their pupils and are fully committed to supporting them to achieve their potential. They know their pupils well, and pupils and parents appreciate the support and guidance they receive. Leaders use an appropriate range of data and information to monitor and track the progress of these pupils.

Pupils with ALN benefit from enhanced transition arrangements when they join the school and at key transition points. There is a broad range of interventions to ensure that pupils receive valuable academic support and develop their social skills. Additionally, meaningful partnership arrangements with a variety of external agencies, mean that pupils make sound progress from their starting points against the targets identified in their Individual Development Plans (IDP).

The IDPs and one-page profiles incorporate the views of pupils and their families effectively, and provide useful and practical summaries for teachers to enable them to support pupils well. Pupils who attend the local authority's newly formed 'Specialist Teaching Facility' say they feel safe and well supported.

Leading and improving

The headteacher provides thoughtful, considered leadership. His vision of embedding the school at the heart of its community is understood well by all staff and pervades all their work.

Roles in the temporary senior leadership structure are clear, equitable and align well with the school's improvement priorities. Senior leaders promote high expectations in all aspects of their work and have been successful in fostering a culture of collaboration and reflection across the school. In general, middle leaders are committed, enthusiastic and have a sound understanding of their role.

Performance management arrangements allow staff to set objectives focused on improving their classroom practice and these align appropriately with whole-school priorities. Staff are held to account suitably through the line management process, which focuses well on pupil progress and well-being. However, these arrangements are not always systematic enough to provide leaders with a sufficiently thorough overview of progress against improvement priorities.

Governors are thoroughly committed to the success of the school and provide senior leaders with valuable support and challenge. The business manager, headteacher and governing body monitor the school's expenditure meticulously, ensuring that all spending aligns closely with improvement priorities.

Leaders have a strong focus on addressing national priorities, for example the promotion of the Welsh language and reducing the impact of poverty on attainment. The school uses a wide range of strategies to improve the outcomes of pupils from low income households. This includes judicious use of the pupil development grant, which is planned and evaluated thoroughly. This has had a positive impact on the outcomes of these pupils. During the academic years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024, the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals in their Key Stage 4 qualifications is well above that of their counterparts in similar schools.

Senior leaders regularly carry out a beneficial range of self-evaluation activities, gathering a broad range of first-hand evidence, including the views of pupils and parents. This helps leaders to identify the broad strengths and areas for development and amend their provision accordingly. In the majority of cases, leaders identify clearly the specific aspects of their provision that require improvement and plan precisely to address them. However, where leaders do not pay sufficient attention to the impact of their provision on pupil outcomes, this results in them having an overgenerous view of the impact of teaching and assessment on pupil progress. This reduces how effectively they plan for improvement.

The school's professional learning programme is planned thoughtfully to address school priorities and meets the needs of individual staff and subject areas. Staff enjoy regular, beneficial opportunities to share good practice, for example through the teaching and learning bulletins. However, staff do not always evaluate the impact of these activities thoroughly enough.

The school's improvement priorities are rooted firmly in its vision and ambition to promote a strong sense of 'Cynefin'. The school uses a range of strategies to help pupils develop a tangible sense of belonging to their local community. For example the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion committee, which promotes pupils' cultural understanding, includes pupils, staff and faith and community leaders. In addition, the parental advisory group provides the school with beneficial input on a variety of topics, including the curriculum. This helps to place the school at the heart of its community.

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 manage the school's finances appropriately, including the use of the pupil development grant.

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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