

A report on

Bedwas High School

**Newport Road
Bedwas
CF83 8BJ**

Date of inspection: January 2026

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About Bedwas High School

Name of provider	Bedwas High School
Local authority	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	666
Pupils of statutory school age	631
Number in sixth form	35
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 20.3%)	31.1%
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 9.0%)	3.3%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	*
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	*
Lead partner for Initial teacher education	No
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2019

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Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/05/2017
Start date of inspection	01/09/2026

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

Bedwas High School provides a supportive environment where most pupils feel safe. Many pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and benefit from positive relationships with staff. Most pupils are courteous, respectful and behave well in lessons and around the school. In the majority of lessons, pupils make adequate progress. In these lessons, teachers have secure subject knowledge, make use of well-established routines and provide clear explanations.

In a minority of lessons, low expectations, weak planning and overly scaffolded or heavily teacher-led tasks impede learning. In these lessons, questioning does not extend pupils' thinking, the pace of learning is slow, and pupils often become passive, reducing their independence and sustained engagement. As a result, a minority of pupils make only limited progress.

The curriculum offers a broad range of relevant learning experiences, including worthwhile enrichment activities and appropriate academic and vocational pathways. The school promotes Welsh culture and identity well, with purposeful whole-school events and positive partnership work with primary schools. However, the coordination, monitoring and evaluation of the provision for the progressive development of pupils' skills is underdeveloped. Opportunities for the development of these skills in meaningful contexts across the curriculum are limited.

Leaders demonstrate a commitment to pupil well-being and have established a range of thoughtful and effective interventions which have a positive impact on pupils' behaviour, engagement and attendance. The school supports transitions effectively, providing helpful guidance as pupils join the school and move on to post-16 education, employment or training. Partnerships with a wide range of external agencies enhance pupils' well-being, for example through work experience for those at risk of exclusion. Whilst the attendance of pupils has improved, the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals remains too low.

The school's senior leadership capacity has reduced considerably. As a result, the remaining leaders carry an overly broad range of responsibilities, which limits their ability to provide clear strategic direction. Ongoing financial pressures further restrict the school's ability to strengthen leadership capacity. Professional learning does not focus closely enough on the aspects that require the most improvement, and the quality of line-management support for middle leaders is too variable. As a result, persistent weaknesses remain in teaching, skills development, self-evaluation, and planning for improvement.

Furthermore, whilst governors are committed to the school, their ability to provide effective support and challenge has been limited by an extended period without meetings.

Recommendations

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

- R1 Improve the quality of teaching to enable pupils of all abilities to make good progress
- R2 Review the roles and responsibilities of senior leaders to enable them to provide the necessary strategic direction
- R3 Strengthen arrangements for self-evaluation, improvement planning, professional learning and line management of senior and middle leaders
- R4 Strengthen the provision for and the coordination of the progressive development of pupils' reading, writing and numeracy skills
- R5 Ensure governors fulfil their roles fully and are able to challenge and support senior leaders in improving important aspects of the school's work
- R6 Work closely with the local authority to provide robust financial management

What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school is in need of significant improvement. The school will draw up an action plan which shows how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress about 12 months after the publication of this report.

Main findings

Teaching and learning

Most pupils at Bedwas High School are courteous, welcoming and engage well with each other and visitors. They behave well in lessons, and many have positive attitudes to learning. This is supported by productive working relationships with their teachers. Despite this, a few pupils are not always punctual to their lessons.

In the majority of lessons, pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), make at least adequate progress in developing their knowledge and understanding. In these lessons, teachers:

- have strong subject knowledge and plan sequences of suitable activities that build appropriately on pupils' prior learning
- have well established classroom routines that support a prompt start to learning
- provide clear explanations and monitor pupils' progress suitably using appropriate assessment strategies to identify misconceptions
- use questioning suitably to check understanding and support pupils' recall.

In the very few lessons where pupils make strong progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills, teachers have high expectations of their pupils, plan effectively for learning and make effective use of questioning to deepen pupils' understanding. These teachers model language well, emphasising key terminology, and provide helpful demonstrations that support learning.

In a minority of lessons, shortcomings in teaching result in pupils making only limited progress. In these lessons, teachers:

- have low expectations of what pupils can achieve and do not plan well enough to support pupils' learning
- either talk too much, over-scaffold activities, or plan activities that keep pupils busy rather than supporting their learning
- ask only simple questions and do not help pupils to develop and improve their verbal responses
- do not secure an adequate pace of learning
- too often rely on pupils remembering routines and following step-by-step guides rather than securing their deeper understanding of the concepts being taught

As a result, in these lessons pupils struggle to maintain their concentration, are often passive in their learning and do not develop their independent learning skills well enough.

In the sixth form, most pupils engage well in their learning. They contribute willingly to class discussions and are articulate when discussing their work, explaining their reasoning confidently and clearly.

Overall, written feedback does not give pupils sufficient guidance on what they have done well, what they need to improve, or how to make those improvements. Too often, teacher feedback is overly generous and focuses more on presentation and task completion than on developing pupils' subject specific skills, knowledge and understanding. When pupils are given precise targets and time to reflect on them, they generally make suitable improvements. However, such opportunities are limited, and a minority of pupils do not demonstrate pride in the presentation of their work, or they have gaps in their learning.

There are limited opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy, numeracy and digital skills in meaningful contexts across the curriculum. The provision to support the progressive development of these skills is underdeveloped and is not always supported appropriately in relevant subjects.

A few pupils use inference effectively to enhance their understanding of, for instance, characters in video clips, and they build well on the contributions of others. Although the majority of pupils respond suitably to teachers' questions, their answers are frequently brief, underdeveloped, and their vocabulary is limited. Pupils' progress in developing their verbal responses is restricted by teachers asking too many narrow questions which do not probe their understanding or challenge them to develop their responses.

The school recognises the importance of developing pupils' reading skills, but the effectiveness of how well subject areas support pupils' reading skills is too variable. Many pupils demonstrate a basic understanding of the texts they read and can locate and retrieve information from texts suitably, although the time they spend on this basic reading skill is disproportionate. A minority of pupils are confident in their analysis of short sources in history, for example when considering the causes of the First World War. A similar proportion demonstrate an ability to synthesise information suitably when preparing for examinations but do not benefit from sufficient worthwhile opportunities to develop this skill in different subjects. Although the reading of dystopian texts for example, presents a number of pupils with worthwhile opportunities to develop their advanced reading skills, too often the tasks set by teachers lack sufficient challenge for them to do so. As a result, around half of pupils do not use or develop a sufficient range of more advanced reading strategies to support their learning. Currently, there are no supportive intervention groups other than those for pupils with ALN.

Many pupils benefit from suitable opportunities to write for different purposes and audiences. A minority of pupils produce narrative and descriptive writing that is technically secure and structured suitably. However, the majority of pupils make basic errors in their writing. Often, it lacks control so loses fluency and coherence. There is rarely any clear or consistent expectation for pupils to proofread and edit their writing before they hand it to the teacher. The inconsistent and frequently ineffective marking for literacy does not support pupils and often leads to the perpetuation of their errors. Pupils' potential to develop their writing skills is also impeded by being encouraged to produce too many short GCSE type responses in Year 7 to Year 9, or to complete worksheets which limit the space for them to develop their responses. Furthermore, teachers do not pay sufficient attention to ensuring pupils have a clear enough understanding of the conventions of different writing types. This often results in them making incorrect language choices, so their writing lacks the correct tone.

Many pupils explore and apply their numeracy skills well, for example when working with recipes and converting units in mathematics, and when using equations in science to calculate percentage mass. The majority work accurately with percentage calculations, both with and without a calculator. They plot and interpret graphs appropriately when given the opportunity, using these to explain scientific findings such as the effect of temperature on enzyme reactions. Opportunities for pupils to apply and develop their numeracy skills meaningfully in relevant subjects are limited, and additional support for those with weak numeracy skills is insufficient, with too few targeted interventions. Many pupils do not show their workings clearly enough, meaning they cannot check errors or deepen their understanding. When they do record their methods, they often do so mechanically without grasping underlying concepts. A minority also make errors in axes, scales and plotting, leading to inaccurate graphs that hinder their ability to make predictions or answer questions.

Digital skills are primarily developed in information and communication technology lessons. When given the opportunity, the majority of pupils develop a suitable understanding of digital coding skills. For example, in Year 8 they use features such as selection, loops and variables in coding software to make interactive quizzes more dynamic and purposeful. However, opportunities for pupils to develop their digital skills across other relevant subjects across the curriculum are limited. As a result many pupils' digital skills remain underdeveloped.

The school promotes Welsh culture and identity effectively through a range of whole-school events and celebrations, including Dydd Santes Dwynwen, Diwrnod Miwisg Cymru and the school Eisteddfod. In a few lessons across the curriculum, staff promote the Welsh language effectively through the regular use of Welsh in everyday classroom interactions. In addition, the school works well with partner primary schools to strengthen pupils'

Welsh cultural and curricular experiences and provides valuable curricular support and professional learning for staff in partner primary schools.

Many pupils have a positive attitude to learning Welsh. They make at least suitable progress in their Welsh language skills. They write short paragraphs to describe where they live or places they have visited using appropriate adjectives and opinions. A few pupils make strong progress, writing extended passages with accuracy and using a suitably broad vocabulary. In a minority of cases, pupils make regular grammatical errors when writing extended pieces. In general, pupils are too reliant on vocabulary lists and sentence builders. Many pupils proof-read short texts and make suitable corrections, and the majority retrieve relevant information from these texts.

Leaders have developed a clear and shared vision for their Curriculum for Wales that is rooted in the school's motto of 'caring and achieving' which includes an ambition for all pupils to access 14 specific learning experiences by the age of 14. The curriculum provides pupils with broadly relevant learning experiences. This includes enrichment days such as a Chinese New Year themed day in humanities and a science and technology 'blast off' day.

Leaders work productively with partner primary schools, including identifying non-negotiable skills across areas of learning and experience, joint professional learning and funded collaborative projects. This is beginning to support continuity and coherence in pupils' learning as they move into secondary education.

The school provides a suitable balance of academic and vocational learning pathways for pupils in Year 10 and Year 11. Collaboration with local schools enhances the offer available to provide a suitable range of subjects in the sixth form. Leaders review the options offer carefully for viability and relevance, and as a result pupils have access to courses including engineering, hospitality and health and social care. Pupils are supported well to make informed option choices through a beneficial process that includes individual discussions with senior staff. These arrangements help most pupils to select courses that align with their interests, needs and future aspirations. In addition, leaders have developed a learning pathway provision for pupils at risk of exclusion, which has had a positive impact on their attendance and behaviour and includes valuable opportunities for external vocational learning, such as motor mechanics and animal care.

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural awareness is well structured in Year 7 to Year 9 and is informed by local community issues and data gathered from pupil surveys. Through dedicated lessons, older pupils learn about a wide range of important topics. This provision is enhanced by a beneficial programme of external speakers raising awareness of ongoing important societal issues, including misogyny, sexual health and knife crime. However, a few older pupils do not receive appropriate provision for Personal and Social Education (PSE)

Pupils benefit from a suitable range of opportunities to develop their understanding of equality and diversity. For example, they study units about 'Bedwas Boys' and 'The Windrush' generation in humanities lessons, and assemblies and form-time discussions focus on contemporary issues such as Black History Month and global politics.

An appropriate range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities complement the curriculum effectively. These include sports clubs, subject-based clubs and GCSE catch-up sessions. Staff also run many worthwhile trips and visits, which benefit pupils educationally and socially, such as to a local climbing centre, St Fagan's in Cardiff and museums in London.

Well-being, care, support and guidance

Over the last 18 months, senior leaders have restructured the pastoral team beneficially, increasing its capacity and promoting a holistic view of pupils' progress and well-being. In general, the school deals promptly and effectively with any instances of bullying and most pupils say they do not experience bullying at school. However, a very few pupils feel that actions staff take do not always prevent bullying from recurring. Most pupils say that staff encourage them to respect others, and many say that the school promotes diversity effectively.

The school has suitable arrangements for safeguarding, including safe recruitment and child protection procedures. Staff generally understand their responsibilities and know when and how to report safeguarding concerns. Leaders work appropriately with external agencies when making child protection referrals and the school ensures that all school staff receive appropriate safeguarding training relevant to their roles, including regular briefings around keeping pupils safe. As a result, most pupils feel safe in school. However, strategic leadership of safeguarding lacks sufficient coherence and communication across the safeguarding structure is not strong enough. This limits the school's ability to ensure a clear, unified approach to safeguarding. Consequently, the culture of safeguarding is not yet fully embedded across the school.

The school has refreshed its behaviour for learning approach by placing a clearer emphasis on nurturing and restoring positive relationships. Leaders have introduced a suitable range of interventions to support vulnerable pupils appropriately. For example, the 'Learning Pathways Base' offers a flexible, personalised programme for a small number of pupils, including off-site vocational opportunities, and the intervention manager provides valuable support to help pupils build resilience and self-esteem. These developments have contributed to improvements in pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school, as well as increased rates of attendance.

The school has developed a range of effective strategies to promote good attendance. There are appropriate systems for monitoring and supporting attendance, including regular pastoral meetings and frequent parental contact. Leaders have taken beneficial steps to raise the profile of attendance, including regular assemblies and weekly form tutor check-ins. Pupils are motivated by a range of rewards, including rewards for tutor groups with the highest attendance. As a result of these strategies, pupils are increasingly aware of the importance of being in school. Between 2022-2023 and 2024-2025, attendance rates improved and are above that of similar schools, however, they remain below pre pandemic levels. Additionally, attendance data collected by the school indicates a slight fall compared to the same period last year. Whilst the school uses a wide range of appropriate strategies to tackle the impact of poverty on educational attainment, attendance rates for pupils eligible for free school meals remain below pre-pandemic levels.

The ALN team are committed to providing the best possible experiences for pupils with additional learning needs. They know their pupils well and work suitably with parents and carers to identify appropriate support. The ALN team has established beneficial working relationships with partner primary schools to ensure that pupils with ALN are well supported as they make the transition to secondary school. Pupils access worthwhile support through the calm, nurturing environments of the 'Vibe' and 'AIM' settings, where provision is suitably tailored to pupils' individual needs.

Helpful one-page profiles and individual development plans outline how teachers can best support pupils' needs. However, they do not always use this information well enough when planning lessons for pupils with ALN. The school has recently developed helpful systems for tracking interventions. However, the strategic coordination of the provision for pupils with ALN is in the early stages of development. In addition, leaders do not monitor and evaluate the progress of pupils with ALN, or the effectiveness of provision, robustly enough.

The school provides a suitable range of opportunities for pupils to take on leadership roles. The School Parliament has recently been re-structured to increase the number of pupils with leadership responsibilities. A few pupils benefit from other opportunities to develop their leadership skills. For example, sports ambassadors coach younger pupils in partner primary schools and peer mediators in the sixth form support younger pupils with conflict resolution.

The school supports pupils well at points of transition. For instance, staff support pupils to settle well when they start at the high school. Furthermore, when older pupils plan to progress to post-16 education, employment or training staff provide helpful impartial guidance and emphasise the importance of accessing the provision that is most suitable for them. The school works in partnership with a wide range of external services to support

pupils' well-being. For example, there is a beneficial arrangement to provide local restorative work experience for a very few pupils at risk of exclusion.

Leading and improving

The headteacher demonstrates a strong commitment to Bedwas High School and communicates a clear focus on supporting pupils' well-being. Together with the senior leadership team, he has contributed to improvements in pupils' attendance and behaviour. However, they have not secured sufficient progress in several other important aspects of the school's work. These include the quality of teaching and provision for the development of pupils' skills, self-evaluation and improvement planning, and governance of the school. A number of these aspects were recommendations from the previous core inspection.

Recently, the capacity of the senior leadership team has been reduced significantly. Although senior leaders' roles are clear, they have far too many responsibilities, which limits their capacity to act strategically. The school's financial position makes it difficult for leaders to address this issue.

Middle leaders are committed to supporting pupils and colleagues to succeed. The majority have a suitable understanding of their role, although overall there is too much variation in how well they fulfil those roles, particularly in evaluating and improving teaching and learning within their areas of responsibility. Although in general they value the support provided by senior leaders, the line management they receive is too variable. It has not supported them well enough in focusing on the aspects most in need of improvement or in developing their leadership skills.

Leaders gather a suitable range of first-hand evidence to support their processes for evaluation and improvement. This has helped to establish a broad understanding of the school's main strengths and areas for development. However, leaders often focus too heavily on describing provision rather than the impact that it has on improving pupil progress and well-being. This limits their ability to prioritise and plan well to address the specific areas requiring improvement.

Processes to manage the performance of staff are clear, understood well and link suitably to a generally appropriate range of professional learning that is based on the broad findings from self-evaluation processes. However, these professional development opportunities do not focus precisely enough on the aspects of teaching that require most attention or on developing the leadership skills of senior and middle leaders. Currently, the school does not evaluate the impact of professional learning robustly enough.

Neither the full governing body nor any of the sub-committees met between the summer term 2025 and spring term 2026. This hiatus created issues regarding the strategic

oversight and governance of safeguarding, delays in the appointment of officers and in the renewal of different policies, and the sharing of important information. While governors are clearly supportive of the school, their understanding of areas for improvement in teaching, learning and leadership is limited and allows them to offer only modest levels of challenge regarding the school's performance.

Shortcomings in the monitoring of finance, and curriculum planning in particular, have contributed to the school being in a difficult financial position. Currently, the school operates with a deficit budget and significant deficit budgets are forecast for the next three years. At the time of the inspection, a financial recovery plan had not been agreed with the local authority, although they are continuing to support the school.

Pastoral leaders have a sound knowledge of the pupils and their families, which helps to ensure timely support where necessary. Leaders prioritise suitably reducing the effects of poverty on pupils' well-being and engagement in learning. However, the school's evaluation of the use of the pupil development grant lacks rigour with regards to impact. During the academic years 2022-2023 to 2024-2025 the performance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals in their Year 11 examinations was above that of their counterparts in similar schools in science but was below in English and mathematics. The attendance of these pupils has improved considerably but still remains too low.

The school has responded to some national priorities appropriately, such as improving attendance and supporting pupils with ALN. However, it has not had enough impact on others such as improving the strategic planning for the progressive development of pupils' skills.

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 do not monitor the school's finances closely enough, 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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