

A report on

Haberdashers' Monmouth School

**Almshouse Street
Monmouth
Monmouthshire
NP25 3XP**

Date of inspection: February 2026

by

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

About Haberdashers' Monmouth School

Name of provider	Haberdashers' Monmouth School
Proprietor status	The Haberdashers' Company and the Governing Body
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent
Residential provision?	Yes
Number of pupils on roll	806
Pupils of statutory school age	806
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	
Start date of inspection	02/02/2026

School context:

In September 2024, Haberdashers' Monmouth School was formed through the merger of Monmouth School for Boys, Monmouth School for Girls and Monmouth Preparatory School.

This new co-educational day and boarding school educates around 800 pupils from the ages of 3 to 18.

The merger of these schools required significant rationalising and relocation of resources, alongside which, there have been changes in leadership and governance. In December 2024, a new chair of the governing body was appointed and, in September 2025, a new headteacher and senior leaders were appointed.

As a result of these changes, the school remains in a period of significant structural and strategic change.

Summary

Haberdashers' Monmouth School was formed in 2024. Since the appointment of the new head in September 2025, senior leaders and governors have worked with coherence and purpose to unite the identities of the former schools and establish a clear strategic vision. They have drawn upon internal and external expertise to identify strengths within the school, including strong pastoral care, well-being provision and well-qualified specialist teaching staff, and have prioritised improvements in curriculum design and pedagogy. Development plans for the prep and senior phases are complementary and outline well-sequenced actions, though the impact of these early changes is not yet fully evident.

Leadership capacity is developing, particularly among middle leaders who feel trusted and empowered. Professional development is increasingly focused on pedagogy and supported by collaboration with partner schools. Quality assurance processes are developing. However, internal monitoring does not always focus sharply enough on the impact of teaching on learning. Governance provides valuable expertise and challenge. However, weaknesses in oversight have led to statutory non-compliance in relation to staff checks, and as a result the school does not currently meet all Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024.

The curriculum across all phases is broad, balanced and enriched by extensive co-curricular opportunities. The prep school offers a well-sequenced curriculum supported by a strong skills framework, while the senior school provides a wide range of academic and vocational pathways, complemented by a vibrant enrichment programme. Exceptional sporting and performing arts provision is in place across the school.

Prep pupils make strong progress because of clear routines, strong relationships and responsive teaching, though occasional over-direction limits their independence. Senior and sixth form pupils develop strong communication skills and progress in many subject-specific skills developed securely.

Across the school, teaching is effective. The most effective lessons are dynamic and challenging, and a strong culture of reading is evident. However, where teaching is less effective, teaching is overly prescriptive and provides limited opportunities for pupils to learn and respond independently.

Pastoral care is a significant strength of the school. Pupils feel safe, supported and welcomed and safeguarding systems are well-structured and understood. The emerging 'Futures Programme' supports preparation for next steps and guidance for GCSE, Sixth Form and university pathways is particularly strong.

Main evaluation

New beginnings. Building on existing foundations

Haberdashers' Monmouth School formed in September 2024 from the merger of Monmouth School for Boys, Monmouth School for Girls and Monmouth Preparatory School.

Since the appointment of the new headteacher, senior leaders and governors, between 2024 and 2025, there has been a coherent, collaborative and determined effort to build on the significant strengths of the previously separate schools and to combine their identities. Leaders have worked swiftly with strong focus and unity to refine and establish a compelling vision for the newly merged school.

Self-evaluation leading to current and future actions

Leaders have undertaken a comprehensive range of self-evaluation work drawing upon internal and external experience and expertise. This has clarified strengths of provision, for example, strong pastoral care, the promotion of pupil well-being, and the well-qualified team of specialist teachers. Leaders have also identified key improvement priorities, motivating a curriculum review and a renewed focus on pedagogy within the professional development of staff.

Aligned with this work, leaders have developed complementary school development plans for the prep and senior phases of the school. These plans contain well-sequenced actions to support strategic improvement priorities and strengthen the cohesion of the newly merged school. Many actions have already begun, although their full impact is not yet clearly visible.

Senior leaders are building leadership capacity, particularly among middle leaders, by reducing operational burden and increasing strategic responsibility. As a result, these leaders feel listened to, trusted and empowered. Many staff feel more valued and optimistic about the future.

Leaders have thoughtful plans to develop teaching practice through internal and externally delivered professional development. This includes partnership working with other Monmouth Group and Haberdashers' Group schools. Further, recent professional development has focussed more directly upon improving teachers' pedagogy.

Leaders have begun to evolve existing approaches to the performance management of staff. Although these changes are still emerging, coherent links between quality assurance work, performance management and professional development are evident. Leaders'

quality assurance of teaching is suitable but does not always focus sharply enough on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning.

Governance and compliance

The Board of Governors benefits from the expertise of individuals with a wide range of professional experience, including experience within educational leadership. Governors act as a constructive but robust critical friend, supporting the school, for example, through challenges presented by the recent merger. They contributed to the current development plan and have a clear understanding and shared belief in the current vision for the school. Governance operates through a well-defined committee structure. However, oversight of specific areas of compliance has not been robust enough. As a result, ongoing checks to establish the continued suitability of staff have not kept pace with recent changes to legislation and do not meet statutory requirements. The school does not comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024.

Curriculum, co-curricular and enrichment activities

Teaching facilities across the school are extremely well appointed, equipped and maintained. As a result, pupils benefit from flexible, highly effective learning spaces which allow expanded opportunities for learning and investigation.

The prep school provides a broad, balanced and well-sequenced curriculum that meets the needs of pupils across all age ranges and supports their academic and personal development highly effectively. Curriculum planning is progressive, underpinned by a clear and holistic key skills framework that promotes creativity, resilience, teamwork and communication. The prep school curriculum is enriched successfully through meaningful integration of Welsh language, local heritage and pupils' rights, alongside established subject programmes. A wide range of co-curricular and enrichment opportunities, including expressive arts, sport and outdoor learning, further enhances pupils' experiences.

The school provides senior and sixth form pupils with a broad and balanced curriculum. Older pupils can choose from a wide range of subjects at GCSE and A Level. The school has recently added new A Level subjects such as Textiles and a range of vocational subjects to diversify the curriculum offer further. The senior school's timetabled curriculum is enhanced by a well-established elective programme of enrichment activities which include the Combined Cadet Force (CCF), A Level classical Greek and the active knitting group. Further, there is an exceptionally rich co-curricular programme of clubs and activities. Nearly all pupils engage well in these activities, valuing them as a key part of their school experience. The sporting life of the school is a particular strength.

The school has a rich, vibrant culture of performing arts. A wide range of events, including concerts, recitals, theatrical productions and competitions, involve a majority of pupils and the wider school community. The curriculum is further enriched by a wide range of subject-themed trips, visits and competitions.

Spotlight: A strong culture of reading

Leaders place a strong strategic emphasis on reading across the school, resulting in a highly positive reading culture and strong outcomes for pupils of all ages.

In the pre-prep and prep schools, reading is taught systematically through a well-sequenced phonics approach, regular assessment and targeted intervention. Pupils benefit from protected reading time, frequent opportunities to be read to, and engaging initiatives such as reading passports, 'drop everything and read' (DEAR), reading ambassadors and buddy reading. The prep library is a welcoming, well-used space that promotes reading for pleasure, supported by strong parental engagement and close collaboration between librarians and literacy leads.

In the senior school, leaders build effectively on these strong foundations. The senior librarian and head of English work closely to provide a coherent programme that extends pupils' reading skills, vocabulary and critical engagement with texts. Older pupils are motivated through structured reading programmes, enrichment activities, book clubs and cross-age initiatives, alongside increased access to subject-specific and non-fiction texts. Leaders monitor pupils' engagement and progress carefully and refine provision, including the use of online literacy resources, to meet pupils' evolving needs and sustain enjoyment of reading.

Teaching and learning: prep school

Teaching across the prep school is effective and supports pupils to make strong progress over time. Nearly all teachers establish positive, respectful relationships with pupils and create engaging and purposeful learning environments that encourage pupils to participate confidently. Pupils respond well to clear routines and high expectations in lessons, and outdoor learning areas are used effectively to support engagement, particularly in the younger classes. Most teachers know pupils' abilities well which contributes to pupils' positive attitudes to learning.

Most lessons include clear learning intentions and regularly build on pupils' prior learning, for example, through revisiting key phonics sounds or reviewing previous mathematical strategies. Questioning is generally used effectively to check understanding and extend thinking, and short plenaries allow pupils to reflect on their learning. In the strongest lessons, teachers provide timely, ongoing feedback, for example, through in-the-moment

support in early years. Verbal feedback during writing and problem-solving tasks helps older pupils make good progress within lessons.

Most teachers use skilful questioning, observation and good-quality feedback, to identify misconceptions and adapt teaching promptly. This ensures most learning activities are well matched to pupils' needs, including those who require additional support or greater challenge. Consequently, most pupils understand how well they are doing and how to improve their work.

Assessment is used regularly to evaluate pupils' progress against age-related expectations and to identify trends over time. Leaders, alongside teachers, analyse assessment information effectively to monitor and track the progress of individuals and groups and to plan targeted interventions if needed.

While teaching is effective overall, occasionally teachers over-direct learning. For example, pupils are occasionally given limited opportunities to work collaboratively or to explore open-ended tasks independently. When this occurs, pupils have fewer opportunities to develop teamwork, problem-solving and higher order thinking skills.

Pupils' learning develops well across the curriculum. From an early age, nearly all pupils make good progress in their communication, reading and writing skills. Younger pupils develop secure phonic knowledge and begin to read unfamiliar words with confidence, while older pupils read fluently and apply strategies such as prediction, summarising and sequencing when working with a range of texts. Writing skills improve steadily over time, for instance, by Year 4 most pupils write accurately in paragraphs, and by Year 6, many pupils use more precise vocabulary effectively when writing across subjects such as science and humanities. In mathematics, most pupils develop secure understanding of number and place value and apply a range of computational strategies to solve increasingly complex problems, including multi-step word problems.

Across the prep school, pupils develop well as confident and articulate communicators. Older prep pupils, for example, speak assuredly during class debates, such as when discussing the impact of screen time on well-being, using a wide-ranging vocabulary and appropriate subject-specific terminology. Pupils' creative, physical and musical skills are also well developed. They explore patterns and techniques in art, perform confidently in music and drama, and participate enthusiastically in physical education and extracurricular sports. Pupils' singing and instrumental music are a particular strength, with all older pupils learning a musical instrument and developing an understanding of notation, rhythm and timing.

Teaching and learning: senior school and sixth form

Nearly all teachers develop positive working relationships with pupils. As a result of a shared ethos of care and understanding, teachers know their pupils well and are invested in achieving the best for every child. They use assessment thoughtfully to track pupil progress and to inform pupils of their next steps in learning. This ensures that nearly all Senior school and Sixth Form pupils make secure progress over time.

The majority of teachers are enthusiastic advocates for their subjects, demonstrating deep and broad knowledge of their fields. As a result, nearly all pupils trust teachers and value their feedback. Nearly all teachers demonstrate strong knowledge of the requirements of public examinations, which they use to direct their teaching. The majority of teachers are highly effective behaviour and language models for their pupils, clearly communicating high expectations of pupil behaviour.

In around half of lessons where teaching is most effective, staff skilfully adapt explanations and activities in response to pupils' learning. They use questioning and verbal feedback effectively to assess and develop pupils' understanding, providing valuable opportunities for discussion. They build on this practice to set appropriate levels of challenge and drive pupil progress. As a result, pupils in these lessons demonstrate high levels of engagement, and classrooms are vibrant, active, industrious places. However, where teaching is less effective, instruction and tasks are overly prescriptive which provides limited opportunity for independence and exploration. As a result, pupils in these lessons do not always make the progress of which they are capable.

The majority of learners develop their writing skills appropriately over their time in the senior school. By the time they reach the sixth form, many pupils in humanities and languages classes produce fluent and persuasive prose, exploring complex ideas using technical vocabulary correctly. However, across the senior curriculum there are too few opportunities for pupils to explore, share and develop their understanding through their writing.

Across the senior school and sixth form, the majority of pupils make suitable progress with their oracy skills. When given the opportunity, many older pupils offer clear, fluent accounts of their learning and sophisticated analysis of themes. Building on planned, purposeful opportunities in a minority of lessons, senior pupils engage enthusiastically with whole-class and small group discussion. They use their oracy skills effectively to explore and develop their understanding, often in response to probing and challenging questioning from their teachers.

In nearly all lessons teachers create calm environments. Most pupils are attentive and the majority of pupils enthusiastically offer answers to teachers' questions in class. Senior school and sixth form pupils enjoy learning creatively and collaboratively. They experience and benefit from opportunities for this in nearly all enrichment and co-curricular activities.

However, opportunities to learn in this way occur in only a minority of lessons. Most pupils are willing to persevere when they get stuck, although a few pupils in the exam classes are over-reliant on their teachers. Nearly all pupils in the senior school recognise the value of the wide range of opportunities available to them, which they believe will enhance their skills in the future workplace.

Preparing pupils for their next steps, including the Futures Programme

Spotlight: The 'Futures Programme'

The 'Futures Programme' provides a framework that supports progression and aspiration across the school, from pre-prep through to sixth form. It underpins the school's vision and is the foundation of the curriculum.

The programme aims to equip pupils with the skills, knowledge, agency and agility to thrive in the modern world, effectively drawing together pupils' core and cross-curricular skills through their academic studies and the school's co-curricular offering. These skills include becoming confident communicators, developing resilience and becoming digitally confident, and are tracked through pupils' 'Future Ready Backpack' booklets.

The programme also encompasses guidance related to careers and future pathways, which equips pupils with the skills and mindset to broaden their aspirations. The programme also complements the school's personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme, 'HABSMON', with elements such as growth mindset, labour market information and discrimination in the workplace.

Whilst this programme was only launched recently, already its importance can be seen.

Pupils are well supported in their selection of courses for both GCSE and for entry into the sixth form. Year 9 pupils are effectively guided by their subject teachers and senior staff in the school. Year 11 pupils value their 'Next Steps' meetings which allow them to receive up-to-date advice on appropriate pathways for further study or employment, as well as giving them the opportunity to reflect upon their current learning.

The school's extensive support and guidance processes for university applications are a well-established strength of provision. Nearly all sixth form teachers are highly knowledgeable regarding subject-specific higher education pathways and offer valuable formal and informal support to their pupils. As a result, nearly all Year 13 leavers go on to higher education courses, including degree apprenticeships, with a majority gaining places at their chosen institutions.

Pastoral care, support and guidance for pupils towards their future

Across the school, there is strong provision for the development of pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding. As a result, nearly all pupils usually feel safe, supported and happy. The values of the school – resilience, integrity, kindness, respect and creativity - are explicitly embedded into the prep school's PHSE provision, are embodied in the HABSMON programme and the school's co-curricular programme. Pupils lead events celebrating cultural diversity, for example, assemblies welcoming international pupils to the school. Nearly all senior school pupils feel comfortable and welcomed in the chapel and the school offers provision and support for pupils of all faith and none.

Prep school pupils feel confident in speaking to school leaders or via the school council to share their views, which has led to new equipment for the 'school piazza'. Pupils in the senior school and sixth form feedback to staff through meetings such as the Boarders' Forum, Pastoral Committee and Food Forum, helped to shape the 'HABSMON' PSHE programme and offered feedback on the newly developed 'Futures Programme'. Across the school, the strength of pupil voice, particularly in influencing and having autonomy for their learning, is a developing feature.

The school has well understood systems to report concerns relating to pupils. The Designated Safeguarding Person (DSP) and their team take timely action in a timely manner, including referring outside of the school when appropriate. All staff, both teaching and non-teaching, understand their responsibility for safeguarding pupils. The school safeguarding team provide useful face to face training and staff also complete online training to update their understanding. The school has robust processes to ensure that safer recruitment procedures are completed for all newly appointed staff.

The enrichment programme provides a wide range of opportunities for pupils to develop their cultural understanding. Throughout the school, the emphasis is on the development of individual responsibility and character. For example, the annual Year 9 activity day is designed by the pupils themselves, enabling them to strengthen their leadership skills and develop the attitudes and values they will need to thrive in the adult world. The school promotes equality and seeks to challenge gender stereotypes, and as a result, most pupils feel that boys and girls work effectively together.

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 inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard.

The suitability of proprietors and staff

The school does not meet the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Although the school meets almost all of the regulatory requirements for this standard, in order to comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024 the school should:

- ensure that all staff have a DBS check within the last three years [23(a)]

Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard.

The provision of information

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard.

The manner in which complaints are to be handled

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this Standard.

Safeguarding

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

Recommendations

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

- R1 Comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024
- R2 Build on existing effective practice to improve the consistency and quality of teaching
- R3 Strengthen opportunities within lessons for pupils to develop as independent learners

What happens next

Since the school does not meet the standards required for registration, the Welsh Government will require the proprietor to submit an action plan within a specified period of time. This plan will set out the steps that the school will take to meet the standards, and the timescale within which it will complete each step. Welsh Government may then request Estyn to support the school through an improvement process.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from parent/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and support staff through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- 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

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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