

A report on
Hawarden High School

**The Highway
Hawarden
Deeside
Flintshire
CH5 3DN**

Date of inspection: March 2026

by

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

About Hawarden High School

Name of provider	Hawarden High School
Local authority	Flintshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	1161
Pupils of statutory school age	975
Number in sixth form	186
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%)	13.1%
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%)	6.3%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	2.2%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	3.1%
Lead partner for Initial teacher education	No
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2017

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Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/03/2017
Start date of inspection	09/03/2026

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

Hawarden High School is an inclusive and welcoming community where leaders and staff place a strong emphasis on pupils' well-being, aspiration and developing a sense of belonging. As a result, pupils feel safe and valued. The school works carefully to support pupils with a wide range of needs, including those attending the specialist resource bases for dyslexia and social, emotional and mental health (SEMH). Staff know pupils well and provide worthwhile tailored support that helps many pupils make sound progress and develop confidence in their learning.

The central student support hub enables pastoral teams to work effectively together to support pupils' emotional and welfare needs. Pupils benefit from valuable leadership opportunities through groups such as the Senedd, which contributes positively to school life. Leaders have implemented a range of strategies to improve attendance. While attendance has improved gradually in recent years, it remains below pre-pandemic levels.

Leaders and teachers provide pupils with a broad range of learning experiences through a purposeful curriculum that reflects both local and national contexts. In many lessons, pupils make at least expected progress. In these lessons, teachers provide clear explanations and appropriate challenge that help pupils deepen their understanding. In the most effective lessons, teachers adapt their teaching skilfully and use questioning effectively to develop pupils' thinking. Across the curriculum, many pupils develop appropriate literacy, numeracy and wider skills. However, in a minority of lessons, teaching does not always engage pupils well enough, and tasks do not challenge them sufficiently. In these lessons, pupils make only limited progress. Provision for Welsh within the curriculum is underdeveloped and many pupils lack confidence when speaking Welsh.

The headteacher provides thoughtful leadership and is supported well by a committed team of senior leaders and governors who share a clear vision for the school. Leaders use a range of first-hand evidence to inform self-evaluation and improvement planning and address underperformance robustly. However, in a few cases, self-evaluation does not focus closely enough on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning. The school has developed strong approaches to tackling the impact of poverty and reducing barriers to learning for pupils from low-income households.

Recommendations

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

- R1 Improve the shortcomings in teaching identified in the report
- R2 Refine the precision of self-evaluation and improvement planning
- R3 Improve attendance
- R4 Strengthen the provision for Welsh

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

Main findings

Teaching and learning

Most teachers in Hawarden High School have strong subject knowledge and establish helpful classroom routines. They foster positive working relationships with pupils so that many demonstrate respect for their teachers and their peers. Teachers within the school's two specialist resource bases know their pupils well and provide beneficial support for dyslexia and social, emotional and mental health. This allows these pupils to make good progress and gain confidence in applying their literacy and numeracy skills.

In many lessons, teaching supports pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), to make secure progress. In these lessons, teachers:

- plan suitably for pupils' learning and model the use of subject terminology well
- have appropriate expectations of pupils' progress and provide activities that build upon one another and offer a suitable level of challenge
- provide clear explanations and instructions to support pupils to improve their work and deepen their thinking
- ask suitable questions to check pupils' understanding and circulate the room regularly, providing verbal feedback to support improvements

In a few lessons, pupils make strong progress, applying their knowledge and skills in challenging contexts. In these cases, teachers demonstrate an enthusiasm for their subject that inspires pupils' interest. They set particularly high expectations of pupils' engagement and progress and carefully consider how to address pupils' misconceptions. These teachers skilfully adapt their lessons in response to pupils' learning, use modelling particularly effectively and ask probing questions that deepen pupils' learning and thinking.

In a minority of lessons, pupils make limited progress and are too passive in their learning. In these cases, teachers:

- talk too much and do not always address any lack of engagement
- provide activities that do not challenge pupils well enough or are too heavily scaffolded
- do not match the pace of the lesson to pupils' learning
- do not use questioning well enough to probe and deepen pupils' understanding

The quality and impact of written feedback is too variable. In the most effective examples, teachers identify specific areas of development in pupils' work and provide time that helps them to improve their work. Where feedback is less impactful, comments are not precise

enough, and pupils do not respond sufficiently. The school has adapted its approach to marking pupils' work for technical accuracy. However, teachers generally identify errors rather than providing feedback that helps pupils develop a deeper understanding of their mistakes.

Skills

The school is developing a sensible approach to planning for the progressive development of pupils' skills across the curriculum. This includes helpful collaboration between skills coordinators and curriculum leaders. This is helping leaders to plan authentic opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their skills within their subjects. However, in a few cases, tasks do not support the development of subject knowledge effectively. There are beneficial interventions for pupils with weaker literacy and numeracy skills.

Literacy

Many pupils use their basic reading skills suitably to locate and retrieve information from texts in subjects across the curriculum. They highlight and annotate key words and phrases appropriately to support their understanding. The majority use more advanced reading skills confidently. For example, they summarise texts by selecting the most relevant points well. They also make suitable inferences from written and visual sources, such as when interpreting historical evidence or analysing images. They use quotations effectively to support their ideas when exploring literary themes. A few pupils demonstrate a stronger understanding of challenging texts and use more advanced strategies when analysing how writers present characters, ideas and themes. However, a minority do not apply their advanced reading skills well enough when comparing different texts, and struggle to make more complex inferences when reading challenging texts.

Many pupils write with suitable technical accuracy. They organise their writing logically into paragraphs and communicate their ideas clearly. The majority use an appropriate range of vocabulary, including subject-specific terminology, for example when discussing persuasive techniques in English lessons or evaluating artists' work in art and design. They also adapt their writing appropriately for different audiences and purposes. A few pupils produce particularly detailed extended pieces and write with ambition and flair. However, a minority make regular errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. These pupils sometimes produce only brief or underdeveloped responses and rely too heavily on scaffolds. They are not always challenged sufficiently, which limits the creativity and independence of their writing.

Many pupils listen attentively to teachers and their peers and contribute appropriately during whole-class and group discussions. The majority provide suitable verbal responses to questions and explain their ideas clearly, using subject-specific vocabulary. A few pupils provide more extended and thoughtful responses, using ambitious vocabulary and

explaining their reasoning. They also ask purposeful questions to deepen their understanding. However, a minority provide brief or underdeveloped responses and do not elaborate on their ideas sufficiently.

Numeracy

Many pupils demonstrate sound basic number skills and work competently with the four rules of number, for example, when calculating the area and volume of shapes. They demonstrate secure algebraic skills, including solving basic equations and simplifying expressions. However, a minority of pupils are overly reliant on procedures and shortcuts and struggle when applying mathematics in unfamiliar contexts.

When given the opportunity, many apply their numeracy skills well in authentic contexts. For example, in geography they analyse data to inform their thinking and decision making, when considering the impact of the living wage in the developing world. In relevant subjects, many pupils accurately construct a suitable range of graphs which support their learning. However, a few pupils draw graphs inaccurately, and these errors are not consistently identified.

A few pupils have weak numeracy skills and do not have a secure grasp of basic number concepts, which limits their progress in solving more complex numerical problems. A minority do not consistently use appropriate units, and a few struggle to rearrange formulae correctly in contexts outside mathematics lessons.

Digital Skills

Pupils develop their digital skills suitably in a few subject areas. For example, in music lessons they use digital technology to record and upload their performances to a digital workbook to support reflection on their work. In digital technology lessons, pupils use spreadsheets appropriately to design and analyse questionnaires, applying features such as data validation. In computer science, pupils use coding software to develop their understanding of how digital technology can support problem solving.

Cymraeg

Many pupils translate texts from Welsh to English with suitable accuracy and a majority write short paragraphs appropriately. A few pupils make strong progress in their Welsh skills. These pupils write accurately and demonstrate a sound understanding of Welsh grammatical structures. They vary their sentences to create coherent and well-developed responses. However, many pupils are overly reliant on scaffolds and vocabulary lists. These pupils lack confidence when speaking Welsh and do not take advantage of opportunities to use the language in conversation. In recent years, the Tîm Iaith has worked to increase pupils' awareness of Welsh as a living language within the wider school

community. In general, however, the provision for Welsh language within the curriculum is underdeveloped.

The Sixth Form

Most pupils in the sixth form demonstrate positive attitudes to learning and show a clear interest in their learning. Many pupils speak confidently and contribute well to classroom discussions. They use a broad range of subject specific terminology and work well independently. A few demonstrate strong curiosity and are keen to deepen and develop their understanding of more complex topics and persevere well when faced with challenging tasks.

The Curriculum

The school has a clear and purposeful vision for its curriculum that is underpinned by a strong sense of aspiration, belonging and community. The school works closely with partner primary schools to develop aspects of the curriculum, including the 'Primed for Success' initiative to strengthen the teaching of mathematics and to ensure pupils build on their learning from primary school. Leaders plan carefully to incorporate local and national contexts within learning experiences. For example, in science, the school works with local partners in the aerospace industry to help pupils understand how their learning applies in real-world contexts.

Pupils develop their understanding of cultural diversity, equity and the experiences of Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities appropriately. For example, pupils encounter a wide range of literature that is representative of Wales and the wider world.

The 'REACH' personal and social education (PSE) programme supports pupils' understanding of well-being and healthy relationships well. The content is refined in response to pupil feedback and supported well by external partners. The school provides an extensive and inclusive programme of extra-curricular opportunities that support pupils' creative, physical and cultural development. A wide range of educational visits and activities, including a dedicated enrichment week, further complement the curriculum and provide opportunities for pupils to develop new skills and experiences.

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. In Years 10 and 11, the school has expanded its curriculum offer through beneficial partnerships, such as the collaboration with the local college that enables pupils to study motor vehicle engineering and hair and beauty.

Well-being, care, support and guidance

Staff at Hawarden High School have created a highly inclusive environment, where pupils feel valued as part of the school community. Leaders ensure that well-being is prioritised. Staff set high expectations for pupils and provide high quality care.

Leaders have established the 'central student support hub' that enables the pastoral team to work together to provide effective support for pupils. Staff know pupils well and provide tailored support, including through safe spaces such as 'Hafan' for pupils with emotional and welfare needs. The school works closely with families and makes good use of external agencies to support pupils' medical and emotional needs.

The school supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development through activities such as assemblies, thought for the day and special events, such as hosting Flintshire Pride. Pupils have worthwhile opportunities to develop their understanding of social issues, healthy life choices and safe internet use. The school adapts its provision appropriately in response to feedback from questionnaires, surveys and issues raised by pupils.

Leaders and staff offer valuable support to pupils at key transition points. This includes helpful support for pupils as they join Year 7, including enhanced arrangements for pupils with ALN. Year 9 pupils are suitably supported when they choose their options for Years 10 and 11 through assemblies, parents' evenings and form time. In Year 11, pupils benefit from valuable interviews with senior leaders to prepare them for their transition to post-16 provision. In the sixth form, pupils have worthwhile opportunities to visit universities and local businesses.

The school provides a range of valuable extra-curricular opportunities that support pupils' well-being and sense of belonging. Pupils take part in clubs such as cheerleading and participate in visits to places such as Glan Llyn. The 'Book House' also provides a warm and welcoming space, that pupils can access during lunchtimes, to read or take part in activities such as chess.

The school has a well-established culture of safeguarding. Staff and governors receive relevant training and have a clear understanding of the school's safeguarding procedures. As a result, in general pupils say they feel safe in school and do not feel bullied. Pupils are able to notify any concerns electronically using the school's app as well as by speaking to a trusted adult.

Leaders promote the importance of good attendance effectively, for example through assemblies and a rewards system. Staff maintain close relationships with parents and carers and work well with external services to support those pupils with particularly low attendance. Between 2022-2023 and 2024-2025 attendance rates increased slightly and

were broadly in line with that of similar schools over that period. The attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals has also improved gradually over the last three years, and for the last two years has been in line with the average for similar schools. Rates of persistent absence have reduced over the last three years and are below those in similar schools and nationally. However, attendance remains well below pre-pandemic levels.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are monitored carefully by leaders. There is a purposeful whole school focus on rewarding and promoting positive behaviour. In general, staff use a graduated response appropriately to improve pupil behaviour and engagement, including using helpful restorative approaches. However, a few staff do not apply the school's behaviour strategies consistently enough in lessons and this results in a reduction in their overall impact.

The ALN team provide staff with valuable information and guidance on meeting the needs of pupils with ALN. While many teachers support these pupils appropriately in lessons, leaders have identified the need to improve the consistency of this support. Pupils with ALN have appropriate individual development plans and one-page profiles outlining their needs and appropriate strategies to meet them. Leaders track the progress of these pupils' literacy and numeracy skills carefully. Many pupils with ALN make at least expected progress from their starting points. However, the monitoring of progress in other skills, based on pupils' individual targets, is underdeveloped.

The school hosts two local authority specialist resource bases. The dyslexia unit provides valuable support for those pupils who require it. Staff in the SEMH specialist resource base create a safe environment and provide beneficial support and guidance to help these pupils cope with their social and emotional needs. As a result, most pupils in the SEMH resource base make good progress in improving their attendance and behaviour.

There are numerous opportunities for pupils to develop their leadership skills. This is a notable strength. The school has an effective school Senedd, where pupils take on responsibilities that have a positive influence on the school. They communicate their work well to other pupils. The Senedd has implemented valuable changes, for example by requesting additional revision support and a safe space for LGBTQ+ pupils. The Senedd's sub-committees provide opportunities for members to focus on specific areas, for example the 'School Nutrition Action Group' has improved the school's canteen menu. Other beneficial pupil groups include, Tîm Iaith, the sports council, the sixth form council and mental health ambassadors.

Leading and improving

The headteacher is a positive role model for staff and pupils and provides assured and thoughtful leadership. He has an ambitious vision focused on fostering aspiration and a

sense of belonging, and developing pupils into responsible members of their community. Senior leaders work closely together to realise their shared vision. Responsibilities are shared sensibly and take advantage of leaders' interests and expertise. Leadership of both specialist resource bases is strong. The teachers in charge work effectively with senior leaders to monitor progress and promote inclusion across the school.

Curriculum leaders provide effective oversight of a wide range of subjects, while also supporting cross-curricular working within their faculty areas. They work closely with the senior leadership team and are supported and challenged appropriately. Regular line management meetings provide worthwhile opportunities for leaders to discuss pupils' progress and the findings from quality assurance activities. However, leaders do not always ensure that these discussions focus well enough on improving teaching and its impact on learning.

The school has a clear and well-established calendar of self-evaluation activities to gather a wide range of first-hand evidence. This enables, senior leaders to identify areas of provision that are strong and those that require improvement. Leaders use these findings appropriately to inform improvement planning and to target worthwhile support and professional learning. Leaders address underperformance robustly.

Curriculum leaders benefit from valuable opportunities to observe lessons with senior leaders to develop a shared understanding of strengths and areas for improvement. Many curriculum leaders identify and plan for improvement suitably. However, in a few cases, particularly where leaders oversee a broad range of subjects outside of their area of expertise, the precision of their self-evaluation is too variable. These leaders do not always evaluate the impact of teaching on pupils' learning closely enough. In addition, not all subject leaders are involved in self-evaluation activities. This hinders curriculum leaders' ability, in these cases, to identify precisely the most pertinent improvement priorities and ensure progress is monitored accurately.

Leaders of the specialist resource bases evaluate provision robustly and make good use of assessment and tracking data to inform self-evaluation and strategic planning. Pastoral self-evaluation and improvement planning are developing appropriately.

Staff benefit from a wide range of valuable professional learning opportunities. This includes opportunities to share good practice through 'Pedagogy Friday' sessions and the annual 'market-place' event. In addition, leaders and staff benefit from worthwhile and relevant professional learning opportunities delivered by staff from the specialist resource bases and the ALN team. However, the impact of professional learning activities is not always evaluated precisely enough.

Leaders have an appropriate focus on addressing national priorities such as their work to develop the culture of safeguarding, pupils' skills and in tackling the impact of poverty. Over the past three years, the performance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals at the end of Year 11 is generally in line with their peers in similar schools. The school has made sound progress in addressing many recommendations from the previous inspection.

Spotlight: Addressing barriers to progress for pupils from low-income households

The school has a well-established and comprehensive approach to supporting the well-being, engagement and achievement of pupils from low-income households. Leaders use a robust, multi-layered process to identify need, drawing on a broad range of information. This enables the school to provide swift and discreet support for pupils and their families. Support is carefully tailored to individual circumstances and includes practical assistance, counselling and mentoring to reduce any identified barriers to learning. Leaders implement a comprehensive range of strategies to improve pupils' well-being, aspirations and attainment. These include increasing participation in leadership opportunities, providing financial support for enrichment activities, prioritising targeted well-being and academic interventions and offering careers advice and aspirational work experience. Leaders monitor the progress of pupils eligible for free school meals closely through regular data meetings and case discussions. As a result, recent outcomes show that the performance of these pupils is improving.

Governors are passionate supporters of the school. They have a secure understanding of the school's improvement priorities. They are knowledgeable about the school and provide appropriate challenge using the reports they receive and their own first-hand evidence. For example, they meet with curriculum leaders to discuss data following external examinations and with the Senedd to understand pupils' views.

The school has an agreed licensed deficit with the local authority. The headteacher, business manager and governors monitor finances carefully to identify possible savings and appropriate plans are in place to reduce the deficit over a five-year period. The use of Pupil Development Grant funding is clear and evaluated effectively. Leaders track impact systematically through a range of indicators, including assessment outcomes, attendance and progress reviews.

The school communicates well with parents. Useful information is shared through a range of channels. A notable example is the curriculum support website for parents which includes resources and information to help parents better support their child with schoolwork and revision. Pupils' successes are regularly celebrated in school newsletters and engaging items such as videos on the school website.

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.

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