



Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**Christ College
Brecon
Powys
LD3 8AF**

Date of inspection: February 2011

by

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



During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the school's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

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 Regulations 2003. In schools that provide non-maintained nursery education, this report also satisfies the requirements of Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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Context

Christ College is an independent coeducational boarding and day school situated near the centre of Brecon in Powys. It is the oldest school in Wales and was founded by Henry VIII in 1541. A Dominican friary stood on the site from 1250 and the thirteenth century buildings, including the chapel and dining hall, remain at the heart of the school.

There are currently 338 pupils, aged from 11 to 19 years, on roll, including 130 in the sixth form. The total number of pupils comprises 198 boys and 140 girls. The number of pupils has risen significantly in recent years. Typically, about 30 pupils join the school in Year 7, another 15 in Year 9 and about 30 join in Year 12.

About 50% of the school's pupils come from Wales and a further 30% from England. The remainder come from China, Germany and other parts of the world.

About 65% of pupils board. The school is organised around a house structure, with each house containing approximately 50 boarders and day pupils. Nine per cent of pupils have special educational needs. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs. Around 15% of the school's pupils are from a minority ethnic or mixed-race background. Around 11% receive support in learning English as an additional language. Fewer than 1% of pupils are from Welsh-speaking homes or speak Welsh as a first language.

Lessons are in English and the school does not aim to make pupils bilingual in English and Welsh. A very few pupils who speak Welsh study the subject to GCSE level. A minority of pupils study Welsh to GCSE level as a second language.

There are 40 full-time and a number of part-time teachers. There are a further 96 support staff, of whom 39 are part-time.

Since the last inspection in 2004, there have been some significant changes to the leadership of the school. The current headteacher was appointed in September 2007. More recently, the school has refined its management structure by establishing a faculty system to co-ordinate and oversee the work of academic departments.

The school motto is 'Possunt quia posse videntur' (They achieve because they believe they can). The school aims to provide a high-quality, broad and balanced education, with strong academic provision at its core and with an emphasis on promoting each pupil's physical, cultural, spiritual and moral development.

The chapel lies at the heart of the school's life. Daily services are in the Anglican tradition. They are ecumenical in nature and are led by pupils of different cultural and religious backgrounds.

Summary

The school's current performance	Excellent
The school's prospects for improvement	Excellent

Current performance

Christ College is an excellent school because:

- pupils of all ages make very good progress and achieve particularly high standards in public examinations at key stage 4 and post-16;
- pupils are extremely well motivated, show high levels of self-discipline and are very effective independent learners;
- the school's extensive and enriching extra-curricular activities programme contributes significantly to pupils' personal and social development and their academic progress;
- assessment and monitoring procedures are very well designed and particularly robust; and
- the comprehensive whole-school arrangements for providing care, support and guidance are highly effective in promoting pupils' academic achievement and emotional development.

Prospects for improvement

The prospects for improvement are excellent because of the:

- high quality of strategic leadership of the school;
- shared sense of purpose and commitment to the school's values and aims together with high expectations at all levels;
- clear and accurate identification of the school's strengths and areas for improvement; and
- track record of making significant improvements over the last six years in standards pupils achieve and the quality of provision.

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 2003. These regulations require an independent school to meet an appropriate standard in the following areas:

The quality of education provided by the school

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The suitability of proprietors and staff

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The provision of information

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Recommendations

In order to improve further, the staff and governors of Christ College, Brecon need to:

- R1 improve the co-ordination of provision for the delivery of key skills across the curriculum;
- R2 further improve the quality of teaching and assessment by promoting best practice more widely; and
- R3 strengthen the role of middle managers in monitoring and quality assuring the work of their teams.

What happens next?

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

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Excellent

Standards: Excellent

The school's performance in public examinations at key stage 4 and post-16 is very good.

In key stage 4, performance has been very strong and is improving. It is well above the averages for Wales in all indicators. In 2010, all pupils who were entered achieved the level 2 threshold (equivalent to 5 GCSEs at grade A* to C). Almost all of these pupils achieved the core subject indicator (the expected performance in English or Welsh, mathematics and science, the core subjects of the National Curriculum) and the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics. These figures are well above the highest-performing maintained schools in Wales.

About 98% of all GCSE entries achieved at level 2 (grade A* to C) with 58% being at the highest A*/A grades. The school continues to build on the consistently high attainment levels reached over the last three years.

In many subjects, including English, mathematics and science, all pupils achieved level 2. In each of the separate sciences, between 75% and 90% of pupils achieved the highest A*/A grades. In a few subjects, all entries were graded A*/A. Value added information for 2010 shows that in many subjects, including English, mathematics and science, pupils make very good progress relative to their prior attainment when compared with all pupils of the same age. Over the last six years, in most subjects, pupils have made good or very good progress relative to their prior attainment.

At post-16, performance has been consistently above averages for Wales, particularly at the higher grades. In each of the last three years, 99% of all entries have achieved level 3. In both 2008 and 2009, around three-quarters of entries were graded A/B. In 2010, almost four-fifths of entries were graded A*-B with slightly more than half awarded the highest A*/A grades. Slightly more than a quarter of entries were graded A*, a proportion matched by only one other school in Wales.

There are no significant differences in performance between boys and girls or of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. Pupils with additional learning needs make good progress relative to their abilities.

In the last three years, no pupil has left the school without a recognised qualification.

At the end of Year 11, all pupils continued in education either at Christ College or another school. Progression from Year 12 to Year 13 is very good while almost all of Year 13 went into higher or further education.

In the lessons observed and in coursework, pupils make consistently good and often excellent progress. Many pupils:

- have an extensive knowledge and understanding of the topics and key concepts they study;
- apply their skills and techniques very well in new contexts, often displaying considerable creativity and imagination in certain aspects of their work; and
- use their prior learning effectively to make thoughtful connections to other topics.

More able pupils ask informed questions that extend their understanding and occasionally challenge previously-held perceptions.

Pupils of all ages have excellent communication skills. They listen intently and take careful note of instructions and the views and opinions of others. Many speak confidently and articulately, often using a good range of technical terminology. In a few cases, pupils need prompting to offer sufficiently extended responses.

Most pupils read fluently, with very good expression and understanding, for example to access and interpret information. Many write in an increasingly sophisticated manner for a range of purposes, for example to describe, analyse or argue a particular case. Most pupils generally spell accurately and use punctuation and grammar securely.

Numeracy skills are very good in mathematics. Pupils apply these skills well in a few subjects such as geography, science, and information and communications technology, for example to produce charts, construct graphs and calculate percentages.

Many pupils have secure information and communications technology skills that they apply well in certain situations. However, these skills are not developed consistently across the curriculum.

The few pupils who study Welsh either as a first or second language achieve well. In 2010, most of those who entered Welsh second language GCSE attained a higher grade A*-B.

Wellbeing: Excellent

Pupils feel safe in school and most believe the school deals well with bullying. Most pupils show an excellent understanding of how to be healthy, for example in science lessons and by making healthy food choices. All pupils participate regularly in the school's extensive programme of sports and physical activities and show a very good understanding of the importance of physical exercise.

Attendance rates and behaviour are very good. Pupils' motivation and attitudes to learning are particularly strong features. Pupils arrive punctually for lessons and move purposefully around the school. They are mature, self-assured and respectful and show high levels of self-discipline. Most are considerate and courteous and relate well to each other and adults.

Pupils have excellent opportunities to voice their opinions through a wide variety of contexts. They express these in a mature and considered manner. As a result, they have significant influence on decisions about the work and life of the school.

Pupils are particularly effective independent learners. Many take on substantial responsibilities. For example, sixth-form students engage in peer teaching as part of the personal and social education programme. Older pupils are effective role models, regularly mentoring and supporting younger pupils in their houses.

Through high levels of participation in the Combined Cadet Force and Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme as well as other avenues, many pupils make excellent contributions to life in the local community. Through their work organising regular events, pupils raise significant funds for a number of charities.

Pupils acquire particularly good social and life skills through high levels of participation in a wide variety of sporting, cultural and creative activities. They understand and respect people from other backgrounds. Almost all show a high degree of respect and consideration for others, for example through their supportive roles within the school's houses and in organising and performing in the regular chapel services.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Excellent
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Learning experiences: Good

The school provides an effective curriculum that fully meets the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. The curriculum provides very good opportunities for pupils of all abilities to obtain relevant qualifications, across a good range of GCSE and A level courses, and progress to the next stage of education or into employment. These qualifications include the International English Language Testing System and the International GCSE for pupils learning English as an additional language.

The school offers an extensive and enriching extra-curricular activities programme that contributes particularly well to pupils' personal and social development and their academic progress. Many pupils take part in the wide range of activities available. These include regular opportunities for numerous cultural, aesthetic and sporting activities, as well as community service.

Provision for the delivery of key skills is developing well. However, at present these aspects of pupils' learning are not co-ordinated systematically enough. As a result, they have not had sufficient impact on the quality of pupils' skills and particularly their information and communications technology skills.

The school promotes an awareness of the language and culture of Wales well. A growing number of pupils study the Welsh language course and are being entered for Welsh at GCSE. The 'Taste of Wales' course is a very good example of how the school is helping pupils from overseas to develop their knowledge and understanding of the history and traditions of Wales.

Pupils have a good understanding of global citizenship. They also recognise their own responsibilities for minimising waste and increasing recycling. Pupils' understanding of the wider world is promoted well through the curriculum, international visits, and through their relationships with pupils at the school who come from other countries.

Teaching: Good

The quality of teaching is a very good feature of the school. Teaching was good or better in a high proportion of lessons observed. Effective teaching in these lessons is founded on the:

- high levels of mutual respect between teachers and pupils;
- extensive subject knowledge of many teachers; and
- high expectations for all pupils.

In a few subjects, there is excellent use of searching open questions that encourages pupils to reflect carefully on their work and use higher-order thinking skills to offer in-depth responses.

Lesson planning is generally effective with clear learning objectives. Most teachers use a good range of teaching approaches and resources that challenge and engage pupils. Many lessons provide good opportunities for developing pupils' communication skills including an appropriate focus on use of subject-specific vocabulary.

There are very good arrangements to support pupils learning English as an additional language to develop their communication skills and make progress.

Most teachers provide constructive feedback during lessons to help pupils make progress. Most teachers mark pupils' work regularly and, in many cases, provide clear advice on how to improve their work. In a few cases, marking is less consistent and helpful. A few teachers use assessment for learning strategies well to help pupils gain a greater understanding of their strengths and how to improve. This aspect is under-developed across the school.

The use of regular grade reviews and standardised examination results are particularly good aspects of the assessment and monitoring arrangements. Pupils have appropriate targets and their progress is carefully tracked. Underachievement is identified and followed-up at an early stage.

Parents receive good-quality reports that are informative about their child's progress and achievement. In most cases, reports identify realistic targets for pupils.

Care, support and guidance: Excellent

The school has extensive and well-designed care, support and guidance arrangements that are highly effective in promoting pupils' academic achievement and emotional development. These are underpinned by the house structure, work of

the medical centre and the central role the chapel plays in the daily life of the school community. This is an excellent feature of the school's work.

There is a comprehensive personal and social education programme. The regular chapel services, frequently led by the pupils, promote pupils' moral and spiritual development very successfully. They provide a reflective, respectful and often inspirational start to the school day.

Houses, which accommodate both boarding and day pupils, make an extremely positive contribution to pupils' development. Induction programmes help new pupils to feel at home in the school and in their houses. The tutorial system is an outstanding feature of the school's work. There are weekly individual meetings between pupils and their tutors. These provide extremely effective support and guidance, and ensure that pupils' academic and pastoral progress is monitored carefully.

The school produces a range of high-quality information for pupils and parents, for example about options and career paths that helps pupils to be well prepared for the next stage of education.

Effective communication between tutors, house parents, senior pupils and school nurses helps ensure extremely good support for pupils' wellbeing. There is very good 24-hour medical care and guidance on health issues. Older pupils are trained to provide counselling for younger pupils. The school ensures that pupils have good access to professional counselling and other specialist services, if required.

The school has an appropriate policy and procedures for safeguarding.

The school has highly-effective arrangements for identifying, supporting and monitoring pupils' additional learning needs. The well-targeted and flexible support ensures that all pupils, including those who are learning English as an additional language, make good progress. Pupils' individual learning plans contain suitable targets. These are regularly evaluated and updated in consultation with pupils and parents.

Learning environment: Excellent

The school is an inclusive, caring and extremely supportive environment with an ethos of mutual respect and tolerance. The diversity of the pupil population promotes racial harmony and provides rich opportunities for cultural differences to be explored, understood well and celebrated regularly. There is a strong sense of order and calm throughout the school that fosters pupils' learning and nurtures their social development particularly well.

In all aspects of its work, the school recognises and respects diversity. In both house and school settings, working relationships with staff and between pupils are excellent.

The physical environment of the school is very well ordered and maintained. The school has continued to improve and develop its high-quality accommodation and

extensive resources to enhance pupils' learning experiences. Classrooms are welcoming. Most contain relevant and occasionally stimulating displays. Around the school, there are many examples of displays that place particular emphasis on celebrating pupils' achievements.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Excellent
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Leadership: Excellent

The headteacher provides strong, dynamic leadership. She is well supported by a very effective senior management team. Together they promote a clear ethos and values that permeate all areas of school life, set out a well-defined strategic vision and give firm direction to all aspects of the school's work.

There is a shared sense of purpose and commitment to these values that is evident among the whole school and extended community. The consistent focus on high achievement and maintaining a close, supportive community is reinforced by the senior management team's extensive knowledge of the work of school. In recent years, there has been a highly successful drive to ensure that all roles and responsibilities are clearly defined to support the strategic direction. Academic and pastoral staff work closely together and share responsibility for improving pupils' standards and wellbeing. This strong shared commitment is reflected in the outstanding standards and wellbeing outcomes.

Communication throughout the school is very good. Staff are regularly consulted and kept well informed about the school's policies and developmental priorities. Team meetings, at all levels, focus appropriately on strategic issues.

There are comprehensive appraisal and performance management arrangements that ensure staff accountability and help identify their professional development needs. This approach has led to improvements in performance in all subject areas. There is thorough and detailed use of baseline assessment, pupil prior attainment and departmental performance data to set challenging targets and to monitor progress against these targets.

The governing body provides effective oversight of the school's work. Meetings of the governing body and its recently restructured sub-committees, designed to provide more robust challenge, focus appropriately on standards and setting out the school's future direction. Governors receive regular presentations about aspects of the work of the school and hold the school appropriately to account.

The school meets all of the Independent School Standards (Wales) 2003 Regulations.

Improving quality: Good

The school's self-evaluation report is thorough. It contains a detailed analysis of performance data and accurately identifies strengths and areas for improvement.

The cycle of self-evaluation and development planning is better established than at the time of the previous inspection. The school's strategic aims and development priorities underpin all departmental and pastoral improvement plans. In addition to a detailed analysis of performance data, which takes good account of similar schools and prior attainment, the school uses a wide range of useful evidence to support its evaluations. This includes reports by external management consultants, parental surveys and consideration of pupils' views.

Self-evaluation and development planning are central features of the school's work. There are clear links between the school's aims, evaluation and review arrangements, improvement planning and the allocation of resources. Departments and pastoral teams produce annual evaluations that are open, realistic and well focused on pupil outcomes. These help identify appropriate improvement priorities that feed into development plans. Progress against targets is reviewed regularly.

The impact of the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning arrangements is evident in the improved physical environment, high-performance outcomes and outstanding care and support for pupils. The school has made very good progress in addressing the recommendations from the last inspection.

While there has been good progress to improve evaluation and review systems, the purposeful use of peer observation, and extent to which subject leaders monitor and quality assure the work of other teachers is less well developed.

Partnership working: Good

The school has established a good range of partnerships that impact positively on pupils' outcomes and wellbeing. There is effective liaison and communication with parents to ensure they are actively involved in the life and work of the school. Parents are very supportive and contribute well to the work of the school, for example through a very active parents' association.

Links with local primary schools are developing well. The school arranges varied and interesting activities for visiting pupils such as a Tudor history day and modern foreign language taster sessions. A few pupils carry out voluntary work at a local special school. The school also enjoys positive relationships with local maintained schools through business scholarships.

The school collaborates effectively with a range of local and regional business, sporting and cultural organisations that provide beneficial opportunities and experiences for many pupils. Pupils' learning experiences are usefully extended through, for example, strong links to the cathedral, regular access to the Brecon Beacons National Park and participation in local festivals.

Resource management: Excellent

Financial management is excellent. A well-considered medium-term development strategy has been particularly successful in increasing pupil numbers to ensure more efficient use of resources.

There are well-designed systems and procedures to plan prudently for future development projects that ensure funding is appropriately allocated to clearly identified priorities. This has enabled the school to make significant improvements to the quality of accommodation and resources. It has also helped maintain particularly beneficial pupil-to-staff ratios, provide a broad range of key stage 4 and sixth-form courses, and employ a large number of technical and support staff, and a good level of specialist teachers.

Staff are well qualified and effectively deployed. Funding for professional development is appropriately allocated through performance management reviews and reflects whole-school or departmental priorities.

The school makes extremely good use of its resources to achieve excellent academic and social outcomes for its pupils and provides value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

Estyn received 55 responses to the parent questionnaire. Almost all parents gave positive responses to all questions with more than four-fifths of parents strongly agreeing with about half of them.

All parents are satisfied with the school. They state that their children like the school, were helped to settle in well when they started school and are making good progress. They believe that the school helps pupils to become more mature and take on responsibility.

All parents feel well informed about their children's progress. Almost all indicate that their children are well prepared for moving to the next school or college and that those with any particular additional needs receive appropriate support.

All parents maintain that their children are safe in school and that pupils behave well. They consider teaching and staff expectations to be good and that homework reinforces learning. Almost all indicate that the staff treat and support their children well.

Almost all parents consider there is a very good range of extra-curricular activities and that their children are encouraged to be healthy and take regular exercise. All parents feel very comfortable about approaching the school to discuss matters about their child's education and wellbeing.

All parents think that the school is well run.

Responses to learner questionnaires

Estyn received responses from 110 pupils, selected at random from across the age range. Most pupils gave very positive responses to all questions with more than 90% of pupils strongly agreeing or agreeing with three-quarters of the questions.

Almost all pupils feel that they are doing well, that they are encouraged to take responsibility and that teachers help them to make progress and when they have problems. Most maintain that homework helps them to understand and improve their work and they have enough books and equipment. Most believe the school prepares them well for their next school or college.

Almost all pupils state that they feel safe in school and have someone to turn to if they have any concerns. Most believe that pupils behave well and that the school deals effectively with any bullying. Almost all pupils believe that the school helps them to understand and respect people from other backgrounds and most indicate that staff treat them fairly and with respect.

Most pupils indicate that the school teaches them to keep healthy and almost all believe there are plenty of opportunities to get regular exercise.

Many pupils indicate that the school listens to their views and makes changes they suggest.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

John Thomas HMI	Reporting Inspector
Mike Farrell AI	Team Inspector
Jackie Gapper HMI	Team Inspector
Ray Owen HMI	Team Inspector
Sue Halliwell HMI	Team Inspector
Pauline Preston HMI	Team Inspector
Paul Scudamore	Additional Inspector
Robert Carnevale	Peer Inspector
David Bush	School Nominee

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.uk)

Under the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, the school must provide copies of the report to all parents of the school. Where a pupil is subject to placement by a local authority, a copy of the report should be sent by the school to each relevant authority.

Year groups and key stages

Independent schools use a variety of systems for numbering year groups. This report, however, uses a common system of numbering year groups from the start of compulsory schooling to 18 years of age. This system emphasises the importance of continuity and eases communication among schools, governing bodies and parents.

The term 'Reception' (R) refers to the year group of pupils in a primary school who reach the age of 5 during the academic year. Year 1 refers to the year group of pupils who reach the age of 6 during the academic year and so on. Year 13 is the year group of students who reach the age of 18 during the academic year.

Primary phase:

Year	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Ages	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11

Secondary phase:

Year	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13
Ages	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18

The National Curriculum covers four key stages as follows:

Key stage 1	Year 1 and Year 2
Key stage 2	Year 3 to Year 6
Key stage 3	Year 7 to Year 9
Key stage 4	Year 10 and Year 11

Although independent schools are not required to follow the National Curriculum, we use these terms for convenience.