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a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

**A report on
Connah's Quay High School
Golftyn Lane
Connah's Quay
Flintshire
CH5 4BH**

Date of inspection: March 2011

by

Mr Peter Harris

Under Contract for

**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 28 of the Education Act 2005.

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Context

Connah's Quay High School is an English-medium 11-18 mixed comprehensive school of 992 students and pupils, including 113 in the sixth form compared with 973 and 75 respectively when the school was last inspected.

Nearly 13% of pupils are eligible for free school meals compared with the Welsh average of about 15% for secondary schools. No pupils come from Welsh-speaking homes. One percent of learners currently learn English as an additional language.

The school's intake represents the full range of ability. Just less than two percent of pupils have statements of special educational needs (SEN). This figure is slightly below the average for Wales as a whole.

The headteacher took up his post in 2002. The present senior leadership team (SLT) is comprised of one deputy headteacher, three assistant headteachers and a business manager.

The school seeks to make its motto "We care" a reality in the lives of all learners. It cares about learners' academic development and their well being in equal measure.

The school works in close partnership with five other secondary schools and the local further education college to enhance provision at key stage4 and in the sixth form.

The 2010-2011 individual school budget per pupil for Connah's Quay High School is £3602 which compares with a maximum of £4429 and a minimum of £3557 for secondary schools in Flintshire. The school has the second lowest budget per pupil out of the 12 secondary schools in Flintshire.

Summary

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

Current performance

Connah's Quay High School is a good school because it has been successful in:

- raising standards of learners' achievement and wellbeing;
- establishing constructive links with the community it serves;
- improving the provision to meet learners' needs, and
- planning and securing improvement.

Prospects for improvement

The school has excellent prospects for improvement because of the:

- strategic direction provided by the headteacher;
- quality of leadership and support provided by senior and middle management;
- commitment of staff to continuous improvement;
- successful track record over the last three years that has seen significant improvements, in examination results and behaviour; and,
- excellent systems of quality assurance.

Recommendations

In order to improve, the staff and governors of Connah's Quay High School need to:

- R1: continue to improve further the standards and wellbeing of learners;
- R2: strengthen Welsh language development and the Welsh dimension of the curriculum; and
- R3: continue to improve levels of attendance.

These recommendations feature in the school's current development plan.

What happens next?

Connah's Quay High School will produce an action plan that shows how it will address the recommendations.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

In key stage 3, results are above national and family (1) averages in English, mathematics and the core subject indicator (CSI) (2). Results in science are in line with Welsh averages and those of the family of schools. When compared with similar schools in terms of Free School Meals (FSM) benchmarks, results in English, mathematics and the CSI are above average; those in mathematics are in the top 25%. Over the past three years, pupils' progress from the previous key stage has been above average.

In key stage 4, performance on nearly all indicators has improved over the last three years. It is above the national average and that of the family of schools. In 2010, the percentage of pupils attaining the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics improved by almost twenty percentage points from 2009. No pupil left school without a qualification. Pupils make very good progress over this key stage. In 2010, their performance on nearly every indicator was in the top 25% when compared with similar schools in terms of the FSM benchmarks and was significantly above their estimated grades.

In the sixth form, learners' attainment at the level 3 threshold is in line with the national average. This represents a good level of achievement for these students.

In all key stages, girls attain higher standards than boys, though the gap in relative performance is smaller than average. Specific groups of pupils, including those entitled to free school meals, those with English as an additional language and those with additional learning needs, make good progress in line with their abilities. Nearly all pupils with SEN achieve outcomes that are significantly higher than expected.

Pupils make valuable progress in key stages 3 and 4 in acquiring the skills and knowledge needed to move on to the next stage of learning. Most pupils remain in full-time education at the end of key stage 4. A large majority go on to higher education after the sixth form. All pupils leaving school in summer 2010 entered further education, training or employment. These figures are better than national averages.

Throughout the school learners make good progress during lessons. The majority of pupils and students remembers previous work and uses this well to learn new skills.

1) Families of schools have been created to enable schools to compare their performance to similar schools across Wales. Families include schools with similar proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals, living in deprived areas, from ethnic minority backgrounds, and having special education needs.

(2) The core subject indicator refers to the percentage of pupils who gain the expected level in Welsh or English, mathematics and science combined.

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In many subjects learners develop their thinking skills well and apply these effectively to solve problems. Most listen well to teachers and each other and this supports their progress in learning. The majority of pupils reads and writes well and can express views clearly. In many lessons pupils use their numeracy skills well. Pupils make good use of their information and communications technology (ICT) skills across the curriculum.

Pupils make adequate progress in Welsh second language. In 2010, almost one third of pupils in Y11 gained a level two qualification in Welsh second language. While throughout the school learners are aware of their Welsh identity they do not use Welsh independently nor make sufficient use of their Welsh-language skills outside Welsh lessons.

Wellbeing: Good

Nearly all pupils understand how to be healthy and have positive attitudes to healthy eating. They exercise regularly and most engage readily in a very wide range of activities that promotes their physical fitness. Pupils feel safe.

On the whole, pupils are motivated to do well and willingly engage in activities within class. Exceptionally high numbers of pupils participate in out-of-hours learning and community-based activities.

Attendance rates over the last three years are slightly above the national average. Standards of behaviour across the school are consistently good.

Through the school council and other groups, pupils contribute extensively to many aspects of school life, particularly in relation to healthy eating and the school environment. Pupils have been influential in helping to develop a number of policies and contribute to the process of quality assurance and decision making. They are represented on the school's governing body as associate members. By various means, such as regular questionnaires, pupils give their views on a wide range of issues concerning how and what they learn.

Pupils relate to each other in a pleasing way and have good social skills. They readily take on responsibilities and older pupils are well prepared for life and work outside school.

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

The curriculum is very broad, well balanced and exceeds all statutory requirements. The extensive range of experiences provided, both inside and outside the school, helps meet the needs of all learners.

The curriculum in key stage 3 builds successfully on the work of the primary schools. Innovative teaching arrangements allow pupils to achieve higher standards. Outstanding opportunities for volunteering and learning in the local community help pupils develop their confidence, independence and group-work skills.

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In key stage 4 and in the sixth form, consortium working allows the school to offer a very wide range of learning pathways. There are good opportunities for pupils to learn about the world of work. Some courses, such as, "Principal Learning" which are delivered in partnership with other providers are particularly innovative and respond well to local needs.

Throughout the school there are good arrangements to ensure that pupils develop key skills. The provision for education for sustainable development is good; the provision for global citizenship is excellent.

The arrangements for teaching Welsh second language are adequate and the school has good plans for developing its Welsh ethos. However, at present this policy is not being pursued with sufficient vigour.

Teaching: Good

The standard of teaching is good. Teachers are well informed about their subjects and how to teach them. They plan effectively and develop pupils' learning through a carefully sequenced range of activities.

Most teachers have high expectations and lessons proceed at a brisk pace. Working relationships with pupils are very good. Almost all staff develop pupils' understanding through good quality questioning and intervention; teachers modify their approaches and materials appropriately.

In lessons where there is excellent practice, teaching skilfully matches the learning needs of all pupils and high levels of challenge and engagement are maintained throughout.

In a very few lessons, teaching fails to motivate pupils and off task behaviour is not well managed.

Teachers assess pupils' work consistently and well across all subjects. They provide good feedback. As a result learners know how well they are doing and how to improve their work.

The school makes good use of performance data to track pupils' progress, set challenging targets and provide good quality intervention. Individual support is particularly effective and impacts positively on pupils' achievement. Pupils have a very good understanding of their targets. They have frequent opportunities to assess their own work.

Parents and carers are provided with good quality reports on pupils' progress and effort. Teachers' comments are detailed and comprehensive. Targets for improvement are in almost all cases specific and useful.

Care, support and guidance: Excellent

The school provides high quality support and guidance to learners, which is enhanced effectively by a wide range of external specialist services.

There are very good arrangements to promote learners' wellbeing. These include innovative contributions towards learners' development and their extensive involvement in school and community life. Clear policies and strategies on behaviour and anti-bullying also contribute positively towards promoting health and wellbeing.

The school's personal and social education (PSE) provision is well planned and is a strength of the school, giving due attention to aspects of sex education, healthy living, and drugs education. Learners receive useful information and guidance which help them make well-informed choices.

The school promotes learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Teachers make good use of a variety of contemporary issues to enhance this provision.

The school has an appropriate policy and systems for safeguarding children.

Learners who have additional learning needs are identified early and receive very good support. Teachers plan and adapt their lessons, tasks and resources appropriately to ensure that each learner understands what to do to improve and achieve their targets; this makes a significant contribution towards their progress. The impact of provision is regularly evaluated and parents and carers of learners with additional learning needs are kept fully informed of progress.

Learning environment: Good

The school is a strongly inclusive and caring community where each member is valued and respected.

All pupils have equal access to learning programmes and activities. Racial issues, diversity and social equality are successfully promoted through the PSE programme, assemblies and tutorial sessions. Appropriate policies and procedures provide a safe and secure learning environment for all. Pupils and parents are very appreciative of the school's caring ethos and commitment to inclusion.

School accommodation is good. Community facilities are good and both the buildings and grounds are very well-maintained. Resources are well matched to learning needs with ICT provision a very good feature. Displays in corridors and classrooms support learning and celebrate achievement.

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

The leadership by the headteacher, his deputy and other senior and middle leaders is a strength of the school.

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The school has a well communicated strategic direction. There is an exemplary commitment to school improvement, based on strong quality assurance procedures. Analyses of performance clearly identify areas for improvement and appropriate action is taken.

The leadership of the school has high and consistent expectations of staff at all levels. All staff share these expectations. This has resulted in a trend of improvement in pupils' attainment.

The school takes good account of national and local priorities, particularly in relation to 14 – 19 Learning Pathways and the School Effectiveness Framework.

The governing body fulfils its legal and regulatory duties. It has a clear understanding of its role and has an accurate understanding of the performance of the school. It acts as an effective critical friend.

The governing body has good induction arrangements and provides good support for new Governors.

Improving quality: Excellent

Arrangements for self evaluation and improving the quality of the school's provision are excellent.

Middle leaders take exceptional responsibility for monitoring and securing improvement in their areas. They draw on a very wide range of first hand evidence. The senior leadership team oversees this process in a highly effective way. The cycle of monitoring, evaluation and review is thoroughly embedded in school routines.

Planning for improvement is also of a very high standard. The school has a medium term strategic plan and a review of this generates an annual school development plan. Middle leaders' plans address whole school priorities and respond to issues identified by their self evaluation. In this way all priorities are addressed in a very comprehensive way. All plans allocate appropriate resources and explicitly identify success criteria and evaluation arrangements.

The school is developing into a strong learning community. Staff meet regularly to share and develop their expertise, both within and across schools.

The school has made good progress in addressing the key issues from the last inspection.

Partnership working: Good

The school has a clear and coherent strategic vision for partnership working which has contributed to improvements in the quality of education and standards within the school.

Strong partnership working provides a wide range of choices for learners at 14-19. The quality of these courses is assured by strong evaluation arrangements; the trust

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between partners is such that learners' interests are genuinely paramount in planning and using resources.

Excellent links with the local community and the voluntary sector lead to exceptionally high levels of learner participation and engagement in their studies.

The school coordinates highly effective links with a wide range of agencies. This provision contributes significantly to the emotional health and well being of learners.

The school works effectively with local employers and organisations to broaden and raise pupils' vocational aspirations.

Strong links have been established with partner primary schools. Transition arrangements ensure good quality curricular continuity and pastoral progression.

Communication with parents is good. They are well informed of school activities and consulted on a range of school developments. They receive good quality information on the progress of their children. Concerns are addressed promptly and effectively.

Professional learning communities within the school involve all staff and make a valuable contribution to the improvement of teaching, learning and standards.

Resource management: Good

The school manages its resources well and there are good levels of efficiency and cost effectiveness. There are thorough procedures to ensure that the allocation of resources meet identified priorities. Spending is clearly planned and monitored. A strong focus on collaboration with other local providers ensures that courses are financially viable while the breadth of provision increases.

Staff are appropriately deployed to support learning and there are effective arrangements in place to ensure that the statutory requirements of the Workload Agreement are met. There is a useful premises development plan which is linked to the school development plan and is integral to the ongoing programme of improvement.

In view of the outcomes achieved by learners the school provides good value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to parent questionnaires

One hundred and five parent questionnaires were completed, representing a good proportion of the total number of parents. Overall, they expressed positive views about the school. Nearly all say that the school expects their children to work hard and to do their best. Nearly all parents are satisfied with the school and say their children like being there. Most feel that their children are safe at school and that their children are making good progress, the teaching is good and that their children are well prepared for moving on to college or work. Most say that the school is well run and find it approachable if they have any questions or concerns. Many feel they are kept well informed about their children's progress.

Responses to learner questionnaires

Questionnaires were completed by around 25% of the learners, who were selected at random. All feel safe in school. All feel they are doing well in school, that there are enough resources to enable them to learn well and they have many opportunities to get regular exercise. They say that teaching is good, and that they are encouraged to do things for themselves and to take on responsibility. All feel the school helps them to be ready for the next stage of education, training or work. Learners feel that the school deals well with bullying and that they have someone to talk to if they are worried. Learners also say that they are treated with respect, and that they are helped to understand and respect people from different backgrounds. A majority of learners feels that the school listens to their views and think behaviour is good.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Mr Peter Harris	Reporting Inspector
Mr Andrew Herdman	Team Inspector
Mr Gwynoro Jones	Lay Inspector
Mr Glyn Griffiths	Team Inspector
Ms Margaret Haynes	Peer Inspector
Lee Cummins	School Nominee

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Year groups and key stages

Schools use 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, parents and LEAs.

The term 'Reception' (R) refers to the year group of pupils in a primary school who reach the age of five during the academic year. Year 1 refers to the year group of pupils who reach the age of six 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 four key stages cover the following year groups:

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