



*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**

**Heolddu Comprehensive School  
Mountain Road  
Bargoed  
CF81 8XL**

**Date of inspection: September 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:

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

Heolddu Comprehensive School is an 11 to 19 mixed school and is maintained by Caerphilly local authority. The number of pupils has increased since the last inspection and the school currently has 723 learners including 99 in the sixth form. The school works in partnership with five other schools and the local further education college to provide a joint sixth form.

The school is located in Bargoed and serves the surrounding areas including Gilfach, Aberbargoed, Deri and Tirphil. Twenty-nine per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is higher than the national average of 17.4%. Forty-four per cent of pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas in Wales.

The school receives pupils from the full range of ability. Two pupils receive support to learn English as an additional language. Very few pupils come from an ethnic minority background and 3.7% of pupils have a statement of special educational needs, which is above the national average. Hardly any pupils speak Welsh as a first language or to an equivalent standard.

The headteacher has been in post since 2006, and, following the retirement of the deputy headteacher in July 2011, the school now has three assistant headteachers.

The individual school budget per pupil for Heolddu Comprehensive School in 2011-2012 means that the budget is £3,910 per pupil. The maximum per pupil in the secondary schools in Caerphilly is £4,476 and the minimum is £3,443. Heolddu Comprehensive School is sixth out of the 14 secondary schools in Caerphilly in terms of its school budget per pupil.

## Summary

<b>The school's current performance</b>	<b>Adequate</b>
<b>The school's prospects for improvement</b>	<b>Adequate</b>

### Current performance

The good features of the school's work includes:

- a good and rising performance at key stage 4 in the indicators that do not include English and mathematics;
- sixth form students performing well;
- very good pupil behaviour and high levels of attendance;
- the high level of care, guidance and support that contributes effectively to learners' outcomes and wellbeing;
- effective partnership working that has contributed to improving wellbeing and has increased the range of options in key stage 4 and the sixth form; and
- securing the confidence and trust of parents and the local community.

However, current performance is judged as adequate because:

- pupils' literacy skills are not as well developed as they should be;
- there is weak performance in key stage 3;
- the quality of teaching in a minority of classes is adequate at best; and
- there is inadequate co-ordination of skills across the school.

### Prospects for improvement

The school's prospects for improvement are judged as adequate because:

- leadership has had a significant impact on pupils' wellbeing and on improving standards in those indicators at key stage 4 that do not include English and mathematics;
- there is a clear management structure and staff understand their roles and responsibilities;
- self-evaluation processes are systematic and well-structured, drawing on a range of first-hand evidence;
- there is a thorough analysis of data that honestly identifies strengths and weaknesses in pupils' performance;
- the line management arrangements for subject departments are not rigorous enough;
- leadership has not yet had enough impact on improving teaching and the progress that pupils make in lessons;
- the amount of classroom observations by school staff, particularly by senior leaders, is too small; and
- improvement plans have too many actions and lack focus.

## Recommendations

In order to improve, the staff and governors of Heolddu Comprehensive School need to:

- R1 raise standards in literacy and in key stage 3;
- R2 improve the quality of teaching to increase the level of challenge for all pupils;
- R3 increase accountability for improving standards and quality, especially through the establishment of rigorous line management arrangements;
- R4 improve the focus and sharpness of self-evaluation processes and improvement planning; and
- R5 meet statutory requirements for the daily act of collective worship and address the specific issues of health and safety that inspectors brought to the school's attention.

### **What happens next?**

The school will produce an action plan that shows how it will address the recommendations. Progress in addressing the recommendations will be monitored by Estyn.

## Main findings

### Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Adequate

#### Standards: Adequate

Performance at key stage 3 is below that of similar schools and has been so for the last four years. Performance in English is generally weak, although performance at the higher levels is good. Pupils' progress from the previous key stage for 2010 is below expectations.

Performance at key stage 4 in those indicators that include English and mathematics is average compared with that of similar schools and has shown a slight improvement over the last three years. In those indicators that do not include English and mathematics, the school performs very well following a steady improvement over the last few years. English results declined in the three years up to 2010, although unverified data shows a rise in 2011. Mathematics improved steadily between 2008 and 2010, but the unverified data for 2011 shows a sharp drop. Pupils progress as expected or better in those indicators that include a wide range of qualifications, but they do not progress as well as expected in the indicators that include English and mathematics.

No pupil left the school without a qualification over the last three years and the proportion staying on in full-time education after 16 is high. None of the pupils who left school at 16 are reported as being not in education, employment and training.

In the sixth form, students perform well and all students gain the advanced Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification.

There are some differences in the performance of girls and boys, but other than in the key stage 4 qualifications that include English and mathematics, this difference is not significant overall. Pupils eligible for free school meals do not achieve as well as expected at key stage 3 and key stage 4 and there is a large gap between their performance and that of those not eligible for free school meals. Unverified data for 2011 shows a rise in the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as expected.

Pupils progress well in the majority of lessons in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills. In these cases, they recall work accurately, understand key concepts and apply their understanding to new or unfamiliar situations. In the remaining lessons, pupils do not progress as much as they should. A few to a minority of pupils in these classes do not have a secure enough understanding of new topics or develop their skills well enough.

Overall, pupils' literacy skills vary too much. Over key stage 3, pupils who have the greatest difficulty in reading progress satisfactorily. However, other pupils who are not fluent or confident readers do not make enough progress so that at the end of the key stage a significant minority of pupils still have problems with their reading. Other pupils in key stage 3 and many in key stage 4 use a suitable range of strategies to

read increasingly demanding texts and they extract information from different sources effectively. Pupils listen very well and most speak clearly and confidently. Pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar are generally good. The majority of pupils write well in a range of forms and styles and for a suitable range of purposes and audiences. However, a minority of pupils do not write as well as they should. The range of their writing is too narrow and they do not produce enough extended writing.

Pupils have satisfactory numeracy skills, but do not extend them enough across the curriculum. Pupils have good information and communication technology skills.

An increasing number of pupils in key stage 3 and key stage 4 gain Essential Skills Wales qualifications.

In Welsh second language at key stage 3, results are below the family average and have remained stable over the last four years. At key stage 4, there is a steady increase in the number of pupils who study Welsh to GCSE and the proportion is now similar to the family and Wales averages. Performance at level 2 improved in 2010, but was still below the family and Wales averages. Unverified school data for 2011 shows a further improvement and moves the figures closer to the Wales average.

### **Wellbeing: Good**

Pupils feel safe in school and nearly all feel that the school deals well with bullying. Pupils behave very well in classes and around the school. They are courteous and show respect for one another and for their teachers. Pupils are keen to take on additional responsibilities within the school, for example to act as peer mentors or as 'buddies' for younger pupils. Attendance is good and compares very well to levels in similar schools.

Most pupils understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle. They know about healthy eating and take regular opportunities for exercise.

The school council is well established, and has contributed to a number of improvements to the school environment and to the promotion of healthy eating. It has played an appropriate role in developing school policies such as the anti-bullying policy and a diabetes policy (which was written by a pupil). However, it has yet to contribute strongly to key school plans and a few pupils are not sure how to put their ideas forward to the school council. Pupils have some say in what and how they learn, but this is underdeveloped.

Pupils take part in a wide range of community activities. They have well developed social and life skills. In lessons, pupils are well motivated and settle quickly to their work. They take on responsibility for their actions and work, and have the skills to move on to the next stage of learning.

<b>Key Question 2: How good is provision?</b>
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<b>Adequate</b>
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### **Learning experiences: Adequate**

The school's curriculum meets statutory requirements and offers pupils a wide range of learning experiences. Through its collaborative partnerships, the school has

increased significantly the number of options available to learners in key stage 4 and in the sixth form. There is a good take up of vocational courses at key stage 4. The expansion of courses has contributed to the improvements in the level 2 threshold indicator (equivalent to five GCSEs at grade A\* to C) and to the good performance in the sixth form. Pupils at key stage 4 have a free choice of subjects but timetabling constraints place restrictions on some pupils' choices. All pupils in the sixth form take the Welsh Bacalaureate.

The school provides a number of suitable initiatives and activities aimed at improving pupils' skills. The development of ICT across the curriculum has been good. However, there is inadequate co-ordination of this work and no clear strategy for the development of skills, particularly for literacy at key stage 3. Students in the sixth form and increasing numbers of pupils in key stage 3 and key stage 4 have suitable opportunities to gain qualifications in skills.

All pupils study Welsh second language at key stage 3 and key stage 4. The strategic development of promoting the use of Welsh is at an early stage. Good progress has been made in the development of the Welsh dimension, for example through activities such as the school eisteddfod.

The school provides a very wide range of opportunities for the development of pupils' understanding and awareness of education for sustainable development and global citizenship. The school has an active Eco-committee, which works closely with outside agencies. A range of events and curriculum activities take place which have had a positive impact on pupils' appreciation and understanding of sustainability and global citizenship.

### **Teaching: Adequate**

In nearly all lessons, teachers create a calm, purposeful atmosphere, use their subject knowledge well and establish very good relationships with pupils. Most lessons have a clear purpose and a well-organised structure.

In the majority of lessons, teachers have high expectations of the standards of work that pupils should produce and lessons proceed at a brisk pace. Questions are focused, and effectively probe and refine pupils' understanding. Where necessary, teachers make successful interventions to move pupils on or to reinforce key teaching points. Explanations are clear and well framed.

In a minority of lessons, teachers' expectations at times are too low and activities do not do enough to extend pupils' understanding. Lessons occasionally proceed too slowly and pupils do not achieve as much as they should. On some occasions, work is not well matched to pupils' needs and abilities. In a few lessons, pupils are engaged on undemanding tasks and do not make satisfactory progress.

Many learning activities help promote the development of pupils' thinking and literacy skills, but overall there is not enough attention to the development of pupils' skills, particularly literacy.



In most subjects, marking is regular and up to date. The majority of teachers give learners useful advice on how to improve. However, the remaining teachers' written comments are not subject specific or do not give enough guidance on what pupils need to do to improve their work.

Pupils on occasions are encouraged to evaluate their own work, but this is not widespread.

The school has a system for tracking pupils' progress and this generally identifies those who are underachieving. However, the system is not specific enough to help teachers plan their work. The school uses appropriately baseline data and predictions of performance to set targets, but does not take enough account of additional information from departments in order to refine them.

Parents receive detailed reports on the progress of their children. Reports identify strengths and weaknesses clearly. Most parents feel that they are well informed about their child's achievements and progress.

### **Care, support and guidance: Good**

The school develops pupils' health and wellbeing successfully, and this has a clear and significant impact on behaviour and attendance. Staff know their pupils very well and have close relationships with parents. The school deals well with bullying, and provides regular opportunities for pupils to show respect and care for others. In particular, the school effectively helps pupils with behavioural and social problems to develop their social skills and to relate to others with greater tolerance and respect. This provision has resulted in fewer referrals for poor behaviour. There are many opportunities both within and outside the curriculum that promote well pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Staff work well with a range of support services to provide timely and effective assistance for vulnerable pupils. Specific learning programmes, access to the school-based counsellor, and the Student Assistance Programme have all helped to increase pupils' self-confidence. The school provides pupils with full information and effective advice when choosing their options at 14 and 16.

The school has an appropriate policy and has procedures for safeguarding. Inspectors have drawn the school's attention to specific issues of health and safety.

The school has effective procedures for identifying, supporting and monitoring pupils with additional learning needs. Information about these pupils' needs is shared with all staff. Many teachers make good use of this information in their teaching and planning. Individual education plans identify suitable learning targets and they are reviewed regularly. Pupils, staff and parents work together very effectively to set these individual targets. Staff regularly complete informative reports to parents on their child's progress. The school supports pupils with autism well to make good progress in their learning, to manage their behaviour and to improve how they work with others.

The school does not fully meet the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship.

**Learning environment: Good**

The school has a calm, purposeful atmosphere based on an ethos of developing self-respect and self-esteem. The school's vision statement 'Opportunity for All' is fully reflected in the inclusive ethos that permeates the life of the school. All pupils are given an equal opportunity to achieve their potential. The arrangements for those with a physical disability meet current needs. The school deals very effectively with oppressive behaviour, with sixth formers taking a leading role.

The school accommodation is well maintained, in good overall condition and meets the needs of pupils well. The outside areas provide very good facilities for physical education. Learning resources are appropriate in quality and quantity, and the provision for ICT is particularly good.

<b>Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?</b>	<b>Adequate</b>
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**Leadership: Adequate**

Leadership has had a significant impact on pupils' wellbeing and on aspects of pupils' performance. It has created a supportive whole-school ethos that enables pupils to engage fully in learning. The school is well-run on a day-to-day basis. The school's aims are conveyed effectively to pupils, staff and parents. The code of conduct, school priorities, and the vision and mission statement are prominently displayed.

There is a clear management structure and staff understand their roles and responsibilities. All subject departments produce self-evaluation reports and development plans, and have suitable arrangements for meeting as subject teams. Data is used effectively at whole-school level to identify aspects in need of improvement. However, the effective use of data by middle-managers is inconsistent.

All departments have a link senior leader, but the lack of rigorous line management arrangements for subject departments is an important area for improvement. Formal line management meetings to identify areas in need of development and agreed actions do not take place often enough. As a result, subject leaders are not sufficiently held to account. Communication between senior leaders and middle managers is not effective enough.

Whereas there has been a trend of improvement in attainment in a number key performance indicators in key stage 4, leadership has not yet had enough impact on improving teaching and the progress pupils make in lessons.

Initiatives such as 'policy days' and a 'governors' day' have helped governors become increasingly involved in setting the strategic direction of the school. They are familiar with the data sets that analyse the school's performance. However, governors do not have a clear enough understanding of standards to challenge

underperformance as critical friends. Arrangements for linking individual governors to subject departments are at an early stage of development.

The school has worked effectively to address national priorities such as Learning Pathways, healthy living and extending partnership work with primary schools. Although literacy is a key element of the school development plan, there is not yet a strategic approach to developing provision.

### **Improving quality: Adequate**

Self-evaluation processes are systematic and well-structured, drawing on a range of first-hand evidence that includes pupils' views, book reviews, and some lesson observations by senior managers and local authority advisers. The whole-school self-evaluation report usefully uses the Estyn inspection framework and is comprehensive in scope. A thorough analysis of data honestly identifies strengths and weaknesses in pupils' performance in examinations and assessments. In other sections of the report strengths are described well but areas for improvement are rarely indicated. The same shortcoming applies in all but a minority of departmental self-evaluation reports.

The amount of classroom observations by school staff, particularly by senior leaders, has been too small. This has restricted the leadership team's knowledge about the quality of teaching and also limited the spread of good practice.

Improvement plans are appropriately based on self-evaluation. The detailed school improvement plan contains a very large number of actions. These actions are not always clearly enough described, and the large number makes the plan difficult to follow. The plan includes a useful list of key priorities, but its format does not make it easy to focus on these.

Departmental development plans are generally thorough. On the whole they are at least adequate and sometimes good but, as with the school plan, actions are not adequately prioritised, sometimes too numerous to be manageable, and not always clearly enough described.

The school is involved in several networks of professional practice. Within the school, working parties have been set up by groups of staff to focus on specific relevant issues, but their work is at an early stage and there has been little impact on classroom practice.

Since the last inspection, attendance and punctuality have improved significantly. However, there has not been enough progress on other recommendations.

### **Partnership working: Good**

The school has developed effective partnerships with a wide range of organisations and other key partners. These partnerships contribute well to improving wellbeing, extending learning experiences and widening the options available to pupils.

The school has worked especially well with partners in the local 14-19 network. This has a positive impact on increasing the options available to pupils at key stage 4 and the sixth form. Information about the progress and outcomes of pupils on partnership courses is shared well.

Partnerships with primary schools are good and contribute well to the effective transition of pupils from Year 6 to Year 7. The school provides a wide range of activities and informative events to make sure that there is suitable continuity and progression from primary schools.

The standing of the school with parents and the local community has been significantly improved. Communication with parents is very good and contributes well to the calm, disciplined ethos of the school.

The school works well in collaboration with a wide range of community organisations and groups. For example, the Community Partnership provides the school with many opportunities to strengthen its role within the local community. The school also hosts Flying Start provision, which offers work-related placements for pupils.

### **Resource management: Adequate**

The school is appropriately staffed to teach the curriculum. Suitable performance management systems lead effectively to the identification of professional development needs of staff.

Resources are managed well. Action by the leadership team has contributed to some significant reductions in costs, for example in covering absence. Spending priorities are clearly identified in relation to proposals in the school development plan. There are appropriate arrangements to monitor spending and the school has a small balance in reserve.

Although resource management is good, taking into account standards and pupils' progress overall, value for money is adequate.

## Appendix 1

### Commentary on performance data

At key stage 3 over the last four years, the core subject indicator (CSI – the expected performance in English or Welsh, mathematics and science, the core subjects of the National Curriculum) has generally declined and is below the figure of five years ago. In 2011, performance was well below the family average and the gap to the family average has widened. When compared with similar schools based on the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals, the school has been in the bottom quarter for the last three years and well below the lowest quartile in the last two. In English, performance has been weak. In 2011, it was well below the family average and for the last four years it has been in the bottom quarter of performance levels for similar schools based on the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals. However, performance at level 6 and above has improved over the last three years and is now above the family average. In 2011, mathematics improved from the decline over the previous three years, but it was still below the family average and in the bottom quarter of performance levels for similar schools in terms of free-school-meal benchmarks. At level 6 or above, mathematics performance improved in 2011 following a decline over the previous three years. Science improved sharply in 2011 and was similar to the family average, but was in the bottom quarter of results for similar schools in terms of free-school-meal benchmarks. Pupils' progress from the previous key stage for 2010 was below expectations for the CSI, English and science.

In key stage 4, the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh and mathematics has risen slightly over the last three years. In 2010, it was just below the family average and near the average for similar schools in terms of free-school-meals benchmarks. The CSI shows a similar pattern. Unverified data for 2011 shows a further small rise in the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh and mathematics and the same performance as in 2010 in the CSI. The school's performance in the level 2 threshold has improved significantly over the last four years. In 2010, it was above the family average and in the top half of performance levels for similar schools in terms of free-school-meals benchmarks. Unverified data for 2011 shows a further sharp rise. The pattern of improvement is similar for the average wider points score (comprising all qualifications approved for use in Wales at the age of 16) and the level 1 threshold (equivalent to five GCSEs at grade D to G), although unverified school data shows a slight drop in 2011 in the level 1 threshold. Performance in English declined over the three years up to 2010, but unverified data indicates a marked improvement in 2011 and would place it close to the family average. Mathematics performance improved steadily between 2008 and 2010, but the unverified data for 2011 shows a sharp drop. Pupils progress as expected in the level 2 threshold and better than expected for level 1 threshold and wider points score, but they do not progress as well as expected in the level 2 threshold including English or Welsh and mathematics and the CSI.

In the sixth form, students perform well with the level 3 threshold (equivalent to two A levels at grade A\* to E) and wider points score (comprising all qualifications approved for use in Wales at the age of 18) being above the Wales average. All students gained the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification at level 3.

All Year 9 pupils gained a qualification in communication, mainly at level 1, but also including a quarter who achieved level 2. In key stage 4, all pupils gained the qualifications in communication and application of number. For communication, just under half gained the level 2 qualification, while in application of number most achieved the level 1 qualification. About a quarter of key stage 4 pupils achieved the level 2 qualification in ICT. In the sixth form all students gained level 3 qualifications in skills as part of the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification.

## Appendix 2

### Stakeholder satisfaction report

#### Responses to learner questionnaires

Estyn received responses from 188 learners, selected at random from across the age range.

Nearly all learners state that they feel safe in school and most indicate that they have someone to turn to if they have any concerns and believe that the school deals well with bullying. The proportion believing that the school deals well with bullying is higher than the proportion saying this in other secondary schools.

Most learners consider that they are doing well. Nearly all say that staff help them to learn and make progress, and encourage them to take responsibility. Most believe that they have enough books and equipment and that homework helps them to understand and improve their work. Nearly all pupils in key stage 4 and in the sixth form say that they received good advice when choosing their courses in contrast to much lower proportions on this issue in other secondary schools. Most feel well prepared for further education or employment.

Most learners state that the school teaches them to be healthy and this is a much higher proportion than in other secondary schools. Most indicate that there are plenty of opportunities to get regular exercise.

Most learners confirm that the school helps them to understand and respect people from other backgrounds, and that staff treat them fairly and with respect.

Many learners feel the school takes account of their views. Many learners also state that pupils behave well and that they can get on with their work. This compares very favourably with the views of pupils in other secondary schools.

#### Responses to parent questionnaires

Estyn received 77 responses to the parent questionnaire. Most parents gave a positive or very positive response to the questions.

Most parents are satisfied with the school. They state that it is well run and that their children are safe and like the school. Most parents indicate that their children were helped to settle in well when they started school. Most also consider that there is a good range of extra-curricular activities and that their children are encouraged to be healthy. They feel very comfortable about approaching the school to discuss matters about their child's education and wellbeing.

Most parents believe that their children are making good progress. They consider staff expectations to be good and that homework reinforces learning. They also indicate that teaching is good and that staff support their children well. They feel that their children are well prepared for moving on to the next school or college.

Most parents feel well informed about their children's progress and believe that staff treat all children fairly and with respect. Most also believe that pupils behave well in the school.



## Appendix 3

### The inspection team

Nigel Vaughan	Reporting Inspector
Mark Evans	Team Inspector
Sarah Lewis	Team Inspector
Steffan James	Team Inspector
Sue Morgan	Team Inspector
Edward Tipper	Lay Inspector
Alan Rowlands	Peer Inspector
Mike Cleverley	School Nominee

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website ([www.estyn.gov.uk](http://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

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