



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**Willows High School
Willows Avenue
Tremorfa
CF24 2YE**

Date of inspection: April 2018

by

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

About Willows High School

Willows High School is an English-medium 11-16 mixed community school maintained by Cardiff local authority. It serves the areas of Splott, Adamsdown and Tremorfa in the East of Cardiff. There are currently 586 pupils on roll, which is lower than at the time of the last inspection in 2012.

Around 44% of the pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is well above the national average of 17%. Around 68% of pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas in Wales. Around 33% of pupils have English as an additional language. Only a very few are fluent in Welsh. The school receives pupils from the full ability range. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs is around 41%, which is higher than the national average of 21.5%. The percentage of pupils who have a statement of special educational needs is 3% compared to 2% for Wales.

The current headteacher was appointed in September 2015. In addition to the headteacher, the senior leadership team includes a deputy headteacher, four assistant headteachers, business manager and two lead practitioners.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website at the link below.
<http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/Schools/SchoolSearch?lang=en>

Summary

Willows High School has a caring and inclusive ethos, which supports pupils' wellbeing appropriately. Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school and many show respect and are courteous towards their peers, teachers and other adults. They make appropriate progress in gaining factual knowledge in the majority of lessons. However, a minority of pupils do not show suitable resilience and independence in their learning.

In the majority of cases, teachers plan suitably to include a range of activities that build appropriately on pupils' prior learning. In a minority of lessons, learning activities do not always meet the needs and abilities of all pupils, including those who are more able.

The headteacher and extended leadership team work well together and share a sense of purpose and a commitment to the school's values and ambitions of raising pupils' aspirations and helping them to achieve. However, there are a few important areas of the school's work where leaders are not having enough impact, such as the quality of teaching and assessment and the progressive development of pupils' literacy skills.

| Inspection area | Judgement |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| Standards | Adequate and needs improvement |
| Wellbeing and attitudes to learning | Adequate and needs improvement |
| Teaching and learning experiences | Adequate and needs improvement |
| Care, support and guidance | Good |
| Leadership and management | Adequate and needs improvement |

Recommendations

- R1 Improve the progressive development of pupils' literacy skills through more effective cross curricular provision
- R2 Improve the quality of teaching to ensure improvement in pupils' resilience, independent learning and engagement
- R3 Improve the quality and impact of leadership at all levels, particularly in self-evaluation and planning for improvement
- R4 Manage finances robustly to address the deficit budget

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will review the school's progress.

Main findings

Standards: Adequate and needs improvement

Many pupils recall previous learning suitably and make appropriate progress in gaining factual knowledge in the majority of lessons. However, a few pupils make limited progress and complete little work in their lessons.

When given the opportunity, many pupils develop suitable speaking and listening skills. They speak clearly and generally share opinions successfully, although verbal responses are often brief and not extended by teachers' questioning. A few pupils struggle to pronounce subject specific terms accurately. The majority of pupils listen well, showing respect to the teacher and others. However, a minority of pupils possess weak listening skills and as a result they miss instructions and explanations, which in turn impedes their learning.

Many pupils read aloud with reasonable fluency and gain confidence from opportunities to do so in most lessons. A minority can identify relevant facts to answer basic questions, for example in science when studying how sound is caused. A minority of pupils develop a basic understanding of inference and deduction when responding to questions, for example in English, 'What does Capulet think of Juliet?' However, overall, a majority of pupils do not use a sufficient range of reading strategies to support their learning.

Around half of pupils structure their writing appropriately in paragraphs and write with suitable technical accuracy. In general, they use a suitable range of punctuation correctly and many present their work appropriately. The majority of pupils write appropriate descriptions, for example in describing the main features of life in the Middle Ages. They answer questions in complete, well-structured sentences but a minority of responses are underdeveloped. A few pupils write sensible, reasoned written conclusions but many are brief and simplistic. A majority of pupils are over-reliant on source material when writing and this limits the development of independent writing and thinking skills. A very few pupils write extended empathetic pieces well, such as when writing a monologue about being a child in the Aberfan disaster. Around a half of pupils produce writing that includes numerous basic errors and very few pupils take enough responsibility for improving the content and accuracy of their work before it is presented to the teacher.

Many pupils demonstrate numeracy skills appropriate to age and ability and tackle challenging tasks well, for example, in key stage 3, calculating lengths of the sides of triangles in everyday situations through trigonometry. Most pupils show appropriate accuracy in selecting and plotting graphs to display data and they are able to interpret this data thoughtfully. Many pupils have a firm grasp of number skills that they apply to solve problems involving, for example, factorisation and rearranging formulae.

The development of pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills across the curriculum is limited. When given the opportunity, many pupils use specialised software well, for example when developing websites, composing music and creating spider charts.

A majority of pupils develop their thinking skills suitably through considering evidence and drawing valid conclusions or evaluations. Examples of this include providing evidence to support views regarding Nero's character and in discussing the issue of giving aid to developing countries. In a few areas, pupils demonstrate suitable creativity, for example when preparing bright and colourful collages in art and editing photographs.

Performance in the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics has been strong over the last four years and better than that of similar schools. Over the last four years, performance in the capped points score has also been better than expected. The proportion of pupils gaining five GCSE or equivalent grades at A* or A has declined over the last four years and in 2017 is lower than in similar schools.

At key stage 4, over the last four years, the performance of boys and girls in many indicators has generally been above that in similar schools. In three of the last four years, the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals is generally above that of their counterparts in similar schools in many key indicators. Pupils with additional learning needs make appropriate progress in line with their personal targets. At the end of Year 11, most pupils remain in full time education, employment or training.

Many pupils are entered for a GCSE in Welsh and in general, a minority achieve a level 2 qualification. The majority of pupils make suitable progress in developing their Welsh language skills in their Welsh lessons. However, pupils' use of the Welsh language outside these lessons is very limited.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Adequate and needs improvement

The majority of pupils feel safe in school and many know whom to turn to if they are worried or upset. Around a half of pupils believe that the school deals well with any problems that may arise. In general, pupils' understanding of how to stay safe on line is developing well.

Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. Many show respect to their peers and teachers and are courteous to other adults. The majority of pupils take pride in their work and pay due attention in lessons. However, a minority of pupils do not maintain their concentration well enough throughout their lessons and as a result they do not keep up with the work. These pupils do not listen carefully enough or show suitable resilience and independence in their learning. They have become too reliant on the teacher to give them extra guidance and direction.

Many pupils are aware of the importance of healthy eating and have a suitable understanding of how to stay healthy. Many pupils develop positive attitudes to regular exercise through the wide range of sporting activities on offer after school. For example, football, rugby and netball clubs are well attended by boys and girls.

Pupil voice plays an important role in the life of the school. 'Student ambassadors' seize the opportunity well to voice their opinion every week on aspects across the school. The school responds appropriately to their views. The school council has been active in securing changes that affect positively on pupils' wellbeing. For example, it had an input into changing the canteen menu and decided to purchase playground equipment for use during break and lunchtime. The school council informs all pupils of their decisions suitably in school assemblies and through the school app.

Many pupils benefit from a wide range of activities after school that support their social skills well. The 'girls group' in particular raises the confidence and self-esteem of girls across the school. Pupils of all ages are involved in charitable work raising a worthwhile amount of money for charities such as 'Believe', an organ donation charity, and 'Welsh Hearts', a national health charity. Pupils also contribute well to activities in the community including an annual carol service and school productions.

Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement

Overall, the quality of teaching is adequate and needs improvement.

Nearly all teachers have strong subject knowledge and are effective language models. Most give clear guidance and explanations to pupils and many circulate well in class to offer beneficial assistance to pupils.

The majority of lessons are planned suitably to include a range of activities that build appropriately on pupils' prior learning. However, a minority of lessons do not meet the needs and abilities of all pupils, including those who are more able. Too often, activities do not challenge well enough to develop pupils' higher order skills or allow them to develop as creative and independent learners. Activities that are insufficiently challenging include copying or questioning that requires short verbal or written responses. This leads to limited progress and engagement by pupils.

Most teachers develop supportive working relationships with the pupils and manage behaviour well. In a few lessons, teachers use questioning effectively to develop pupils' thinking. However, in many lessons teachers do not question well enough to extend and deepen pupils' understanding.

In many lessons, teachers give helpful and supportive verbal feedback to pupils. In a few instances, teachers provide useful written feedback that provides pupils with clear advice on how to improve their work and they ensure that pupils respond constructively to these comments. However, overall, teachers' written feedback does not encourage pupils to reflect on their work or give clear enough guidance on how to improve it. A majority of teachers are overgenerous in praising the completion of simple tasks. There is too much variability in the correction of spelling, punctuation and grammar, which contributes to pupils continuing to make the same basic errors.

The school's curriculum builds appropriately upon pupils' learning from previous key stages. At key stage 4, the school offers a suitable range of academic and vocational qualifications within the school and through worthwhile partnerships with local colleges. This provides relevant pathways that meet the needs of nearly all pupils and supports them to develop important employability and life skills. The school provides suitable provision for the most vulnerable pupils and ensures that they remain engaged in their education. The school provides early opportunities for pupils to gain a level 2 qualification in English and mathematics. While this is reflected in the strong performance in the level 2 indicator including English and mathematics, the arrangements in Year 11 have not impacted positively on the proportion of pupils that gain A* and A grades at GCSE.

The school provides a valuable programme of enrichment opportunities that supports pupils' learning and contributes well to their personal development. This includes a

range of sporting activities, trips to literary festivals and educational visits to battlefields in France. In addition, the school provides beneficial opportunities to enable more able pupils to realise their potential, for example taster sessions in local universities and English tutorials to develop higher-order skills and vocabulary acquisition with an external expert.

The school has a clear focus on reading including promoting reading for pleasure. It offers effective interventions to support pupils with weaker reading skills. The school tracks the progress of these pupils closely and evaluates the impact of these interventions thoroughly.

Middle leaders identify appropriate opportunities for literacy development across subjects. However, planning for progressive development of pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum is not effective enough. There are appropriate opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy skills in a few subject areas. In a very few instances, pupils have worthwhile opportunities to use their ICT skills. However, planning for pupils to develop ICT skills across the curriculum is at an early stage.

The school offers relevant opportunities for pupils to develop their appreciation of Welsh heritage and culture, such as the annual Eisteddfod and a Welsh club for key stage 3 pupils. The school holds beneficial adult classes for parents and carers to learn the language patterns taught to their children. However, generally, there are limited opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills outside Welsh lessons.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school has a supportive and inclusive ethos, which supports pupils' wellbeing appropriately. The valuable care, support and guidance have contributed to positive outcomes for pupils at the end of key stage 4.

The school has comprehensive systems to track and monitor pupil progress at key stage 4. This enables the school to identify underachievement and provide timely interventions to support the pupils identified. The majority of Year 11 pupils are mentored by senior and middle leaders and this programme contributes suitably to pupil wellbeing and attainment. Reports to parents provide limited information about the progress that pupils are making.

The school tracks pupils' attendance and behaviour closely. An appropriate system of rewards and sanctions has contributed to a clear improvement in pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school. Pastoral leaders produce weekly reports detailing successes, concerns and interventions, which ensure that senior leaders can respond appropriately and in a timely manner to problems that arise.

The school provides valuable support for pupils with additional learning needs. Specialist teaching assistants work effectively with individuals and small groups to improve literacy skills and emotional wellbeing. However, overall, insufficient use is made of individual education plans to support pupils' learning.

The school supports pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties well, for example through 'The Bridge'. This onsite provision enables the school to continue to teach pupils who are at risk of exclusion until they are reintegrated into mainstream lessons or gain suitable qualifications within the facility.

The school works with a wide range of external agencies and other providers, such as counselling services and local colleges, effectively to support vulnerable pupils' wellbeing and learning. This contributes to most pupils remaining in education, employment or training.

The school promotes parental engagement well through, for example, 'The Learning Lounge', an on-site facility that allows parents to meet with senior and middle leaders. Leaders are able to have useful discussions with parents within this facility to provide guidance on how parents can support their children's education.

The school promotes successfully pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural values. Pupils' rights underpin much of the school's work. The daily tutorial session contributes well to pupils' personal and social education and enables them to reflect on their personal values and responsibilities.

Assemblies, visiting speakers and trips contribute suitably to the development of pupil values such as tolerance and respect. The school increases pupils' aspirations appropriately and develops their understanding of their own community and the wider world, for example through collaboration with local universities.

The school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking. The personal, social and health education programme enables pupils to understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle and how their choices will impact on their present and future wellbeing.

The school organises a wide range of extra-curricular activities, which are well attended and contribute to pupils' health, wellbeing and learning. For example, the school has a live radio station run by pupils.

The school provides valuable opportunities for pupils to contribute to decision making and to develop leadership skills. For example, each class has a different 'Student ambassador' every week. These ambassadors meet with a senior leader weekly to discuss their views. Key stage 4 pupils support younger pupils well, for example by running sporting and cultural activities as part of the skills challenge certificate.

The 'Journey 7' curriculum in Year 7 helps pupils to settle well into their secondary school education. The school also provides pupils with helpful support and guidance as they move between key stages such as the 'Pyramid Club' that supports vulnerable pupils from Year 6, and activities to guide pupils in Year 9 with their choice of option subjects.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management: Adequate and needs improvement

The headteacher has developed a clear vision based around the school motto 'Perthyn, Credu, Llwyddo' – 'Belong, Believe, Achieve'. He is supported suitably by his extended leadership team. They work well together and share a sense of purpose and a commitment to the school's values and ambitions of raising pupils' aspirations and helping them to achieve. This has contributed appropriately to the commitment and positive morale of most staff. However, there are a few important

areas of the school's work where leaders are not having enough impact, such as the quality of teaching and assessment and the progressive development of pupils' literacy skills.

Senior leadership responsibilities are appropriate and mostly delegated effectively. The headteacher holds his team to account through frequent meetings, which include a regular review of pupil progress, particularly that of Year 11 pupils.

There are clear line management arrangements for senior leaders to support and challenge middle leaders. These include regular timetabled meetings, many of which focus appropriately on monitoring the progress and wellbeing of pupils. However, a minority of these meetings focus too much upon operational matters that do not lead to sufficient, clear action points. This does not help senior leaders to hold middle leaders to account robustly enough. Most middle leaders carry out many aspects of their role effectively. However, the effectiveness of middle leaders in securing high standards and improving the quality of teaching in their areas of responsibility varies too much.

There are clear, well-understood arrangements for self-evaluation and improvement planning. These include a useful mid-year review of progress against agreed improvement priorities. As part of this review, senior and middle leaders undertake a programme of 'learning walks'. This helps them to identify appropriate specific areas for development for individual teachers and to provide them with suitable support to make these improvements. Many leaders use performance data appropriately to evaluate pupil attainment and identify where changes to provision are required. When carrying out formal lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work, however, leaders focus strongly on compliance to school policies on assessment and behaviour management and pay insufficient attention to pupil standards and progress. As a result, leaders often have an overgenerous view of the impact of teaching and the standard of pupils' work.

The school seeks pupil feedback regularly, for instance through weekly meetings involving the deputy headteacher and a selection of 'student ambassadors'. The school evaluates this feedback carefully, responds suitably and communicates clearly to pupils the changes made in light of their feedback.

In general, senior and subject leaders use first-hand evidence appropriately to identify suitable improvement priorities. This has had a positive impact on, for example, the effectiveness of behaviour management and how the school supports Year 11 pupils in preparing for examinations. However, overall, improvement planning does not focus sharply enough on how objectives will be achieved or how progress against these objectives will be monitored and evaluated. This limits the impact that improvement planning has on the quality of teaching and the standard of pupils' work. The role of pastoral leaders in self-evaluation and improvement planning is underdeveloped.

The school has appropriate arrangements for managing the performance of staff. Their performance objectives relate directly to the school's improvement priorities and support individual professional development well. The school provides a wide range of activities to support staff's professional learning, including timetabled 'CPD groups', action research, visits to other schools and regular opportunities for staff to

share good practice. These activities are linked appropriately to performance management objectives and whole-school improvement priorities. Overall, leaders have been successful in promoting a culture of commitment to ongoing professional learning.

The school deploys staff suitably and uses the available accommodation and resources successfully to create a generally positive learning environment. It uses grant funding such as the pupil development grant appropriately to support pupils eligible for free school meals. This has had a positive impact on the attendance of this group of pupils.

The headteacher and the business manager consider expenditure carefully and monitor it regularly against school priorities. However, fluctuation in pupil numbers has contributed to the school currently operating a deficit budget.

Governors are supportive of the school and have a reasonable understanding of its strengths and areas for development. They are beginning to challenge the school more robustly on its performance in key areas.

Copies of the report

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

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

| | |
|--|--|
| Excellent | Very strong, sustained performance and practice |
| Good | Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement |
| Adequate and needs improvement | Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement |
| Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement | Important weaknesses outweigh strengths |

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

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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