



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

A report on

**Hawthorn High School
School Lane
Hawthorn
Pontypridd
Rhondda Cynon Taff
CF37 5AL**

Date of inspection: January 2020

by

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

About Hawthorn High School

Hawthorn High School is an English-medium, 11 to 18 mixed comprehensive school in Rhondda Cynon Taff. The school is located in the south of Pontypridd. There are 696 pupils on roll, compared with 856 pupils at the time of the last inspection in March 2014. There are 98 pupils in the sixth form.

Around 23% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This is above the national average of 16.4% for secondary schools in Wales. Around 35% of pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas in Wales.

Around 1.8% of pupils have a statement of special educational needs compared with 2.2% for Wales as a whole. Around 27% of pupils have a special educational need. This is higher than the national average of 22.9%. Most pupils are from a white British background. Fewer than 3% of pupils are fluent in Welsh. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language.

The school has a special resource base for speech and language run by the local authority.

The acting headteacher has been in post since May 2019 but joined the leadership team as deputy headteacher in September 2017. The senior management team also includes an acting deputy headteacher and three assistant headteachers.

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

Hawthorn High School is a happy, positive learning community. Pupils are welcoming and friendly and are proud of their school. Many pupils make strong progress in their lessons and achieve well in external qualifications.

Many teachers have positive working relationship with pupils and know them well. They prepare helpful activities that enable pupils to make progress in lessons. However, in a minority of lessons, teachers do not provide a suitable level of challenge, particularly for more able pupils.

There is a strong emphasis on the wellbeing of pupils. They are provided with high quality care, support and guidance along with valuable opportunities to develop their leadership skills.

Leaders have a clear vision for the school and are committed to continuous improvement. They regularly review and evaluate their own work. Staff feel well supported and embrace the school's ambitions for the 'health, happiness and success' of all pupils.

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

Recommendations

- R1 Improve the provision to develop pupils' skills, particularly in terms of reading, numeracy, information and communication technology (ICT) and Welsh
- R2 Improve the quality of teaching and strengthen processes to evaluate the quality of teaching
- R3 Ensure that the curriculum, including the provision for the personal and social education of pupils in key stage 4 and the sixth form, is appropriate to the needs and abilities of all pupils
- R4 Ensure robust financial management and work to eliminate the deficit budget

What happens next

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

Main findings

Standards: Good

During their time at the school, many pupils make strong progress in their knowledge, understanding and skills, and achieve well in external examinations. In many lessons, pupils make strong progress and have sound recall of prior learning. In a few lessons, pupils make slow progress and have a weak grasp of prior learning.

Many pupils are eager to contribute to class discussions and answer questions. The majority speak clearly and confidently, making appropriate use of subject specific vocabulary. A minority offer extended, well-considered responses and justify their viewpoints well, such as when they explain the Christian beliefs about creation in ethics and philosophy lessons. A minority of pupils lack confidence in using subject specific terminology and a few are reluctant to contribute verbally or offer short, underdeveloped responses.

Most pupils listen respectfully to teachers and their peers. Many listen attentively, responding thoughtfully to the contributions of others and following teachers' instructions promptly. However, a few pupils do not listen well enough and are too easily distracted.

When reading aloud, the majority of pupils do so competently. A minority of pupils read aloud confidently and with expression, for example when they act out scenes from a Harry Potter play in drama. However, a minority of pupils lack fluency when reading aloud and struggle to pronounce unfamiliar words.

Many pupils are able to locate relevant information in a range of reading texts well and have a sound grasp of basic meaning. They skim and scan effectively, highlighting pertinent aspects suitably. For example, in English pupils select information successfully from a range of texts to inform their arguments on whether or not extreme sports should be introduced into the physical education curriculum. However, a few pupils find it difficult to understand written questions and the basic meaning of texts, and a minority struggle to apply their reading skills independently. The majority of pupils analyse texts appropriately and a few do so perceptively and with maturity, using sophisticated vocabulary. A minority of pupils do not analyse texts in sufficient depth and detail, particularly when working independently.

Many pupils communicate clearly in writing and organise their work appropriately by using paragraphs. They have a sound vocabulary and use subject specific terminology confidently, such as when they write about the effect of artistic techniques employed by different artists such as Banksy and Magritte in art lessons. A few pupils have a broad and rich vocabulary. When given opportunities, many pupils write at length competently. These pupils organise their written work well and write suitably for a range of purposes and audiences. They make particularly effective use of writing strategies to organise and plan their work in their English lessons. However, they do not always apply these skills when producing written work in other subjects across the curriculum. The majority of pupils produce technically secure writing but a minority frequently misspell common words and misuse capital letters.

Many pupils have sound basic numeracy skills and have a suitable understanding of units and scales, such as when they track the course of a hurricane in geography.

Many pupils plot scatter graphs and basic bar charts effectively but do not set scales for the axes consistently enough. The majority of pupils use calculation skills appropriately, such as when budgeting for family life during the Victorian era in humanities. However, overall, pupils do not practise their numeracy skills to solve real life problems well enough across the curriculum, including in mathematics lessons.

Many pupils make appropriate use of basic ICT skills for word processing tasks and for producing simple spreadsheets and presentations. They also employ these skills to research topics and to work collaboratively with their peers. In a few subjects, pupils make use of more advanced ICT skills, such as when they use a virtual reality programme to solve plumbing problems in construction or when they manipulate and layer images in photography. However, in general, pupils do not develop or practise their ICT skills well enough or frequently enough across the curriculum.

Pupils' creative skills are a strength. They demonstrate strong performance skills in drama and music, such as when they sing with accurate pitch and timing in three-part harmony. In art, pupils produce imaginative original artwork in the form of African masks and by producing work in the style of Arcimboldo. Many pupils also develop their physical skills well. For example, in physical education lessons they display a good level of flexibility and control when executing gymnastic movements.

The majority of pupils develop their thinking skills well and approach problems with confidence and a sense of purpose. For example, in physical education pupils cooperate effectively in pairs and think quickly and efficiently in order to take the fastest route around an orienteering course. However, a minority of pupils struggle to solve basic problems.

Over the last three years, pupils have performed well at the end of key stage 4 and generally make more progress than expected. Performance in 2019 is above expectation in nearly all indicators. Nearly all pupils are entered for the skills challenge certificate qualification and perform well above expectations. The performance of all groups of pupils, including those eligible for free school meals, generally compares well with that of corresponding groups in similar schools. Pupils with special educational needs make particularly strong progress. At the end of Year 11, nearly all pupils remain in education, employment or training.

In 2019, most pupils were entered for a qualification in Welsh and a minority achieved a level 2 qualification. In Welsh lessons, a minority of pupils write accurately and employ a suitable range of sentence patterns. A few pupils speak with appropriate pronunciation and vocabulary. However, on the whole, many pupils are reluctant to practise their spoken Welsh and a majority do not make sufficient progress in their Welsh language skills.

Over the three years from 2017-2019, the proportion of sixth form pupils gaining three A*-C and 3 A*-A grades at A level or equivalent compares well with levels in similar schools. Retention is also a positive feature, with the proportion of pupils who complete their courses and achieve at least three level 3 qualifications in line with the national average. However, analysis of pupil grades shows that, overall, pupils do not make as much progress as pupils with similar levels of prior attainment.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Most pupils feel happy and valued in school. They thrive in the warm and caring community. Most pupils feel that the school responds well to any concerns they raise. They are polite and friendly to each other and visitors, and develop good social skills as they progress through the school.

Many pupils behave well in lessons and around school. They arrive to lessons punctually, settle quickly and are ready to learn. However, a few arrive late. Many pupils sustain concentration well, persevere and show an interest in their work. They listen respectfully to their teachers and each other, and have positive attitudes to their learning. Many pupils work well independently and in pairs and small groups. A majority of pupils are reflective learners who have a sound understanding of their strengths and what they need to do to improve. A few pupils do not engage fully in their learning. These pupils talk when they should not, for example during teachers' instructions.

Many pupils, including those with special educational needs, are eager to take on responsibilities. The school council and other pupil groups make valuable contributions to school life, such as setting up and running the 'Pod' facility for pupils in need of support. These groups have contributed beneficially to the development of the school's anti-bullying policy. In addition, selected pupils work effectively as anti-bullying ambassadors.

Most pupils know how to stay safe online. Many pupils understand the importance of eating healthily and the value of exercise. Many participate well in the range of beneficial extra-curricular activities. These include drama, pottery, pyrography and sporting clubs such as rugby, football, netball and hockey.

Most pupils are developing successfully as caring citizens by making valuable contributions to the community. For example, they have organised events celebrating the oldest surviving church in the area, St Mary's Church in Glyntaf, by publishing a book, creating a bilingual exhibition and an ICT presentation. Pupils develop a strong sense of social responsibility and active citizenship through fundraising events for local and national charities. These include the Alzheimer's Society MacMillan nurses, the George Thomas Hospice, Dreams and Wishes and Children in Need.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

Many teachers foster positive working relationships with pupils. They are patient and calm in their approach and know their pupils well. These teachers have secure subject knowledge and prepare useful resources. They offer clear explanations and provide a sequence of helpful activities that build effectively on each other and promote progress.

The majority of teachers plan lessons carefully to meet the needs of pupils of different abilities. In these lessons, teachers have clear aims and provide activities that enable pupils to learn both independently and collaboratively. They have high expectations of pupils and provide them with sufficient challenge.

In the very few most effective lessons, teachers communicate a passion for their subject. These teachers provide thorough explanations and plan skilfully tasks that engage pupils and enable deep learning of key terms and concepts. In these lessons, teachers model responses clearly and challenge pupils to think independently.

In a minority of lessons, teachers do not always provide a suitable level of challenge for pupils of different abilities, particularly the more able. In many instances, tasks are not sufficiently demanding or motivating or are overly repetitive, whilst in other examples tasks are too difficult.

In a few lessons, teachers' expectations of pupils' behaviour and what they should achieve are too low. These teachers do not manage pupil behaviour effectively enough. Their lessons are not planned carefully or ambitiously enough and lack a clear sense of purpose. Consequently, the pace of learning is too slow.

Many teachers make suitable use of questioning to check pupils' basic knowledge. They monitor pupils as they work, offering helpful verbal feedback. A majority of teachers are skilful in their use of a range of assessment strategies, including an appropriate balance of open and closed questions, to gauge pupils' understanding and progress throughout the lesson. In a few instances, teachers adapt lessons in response to pupils' progress and make effective use of their misunderstandings to provide learning opportunities. These teachers' questioning encourages pupils to think deeply and to develop and extend their answers. However, in a few cases, teachers do not check pupils' understanding and progress frequently or thoroughly enough and their questioning does not probe or deepen learning sufficiently.

Many teachers provide valuable written feedback to pupils. They celebrate the strengths in pupils' work and give clear advice on how they can improve. Many pupils respond constructively to this feedback but in a minority of cases, these responses are superficial.

Overall, the school provides a suitably balanced curriculum that builds well on pupils' previous learning and meets the needs of pupils of all abilities. The school consults widely with pupils and parents to ensure an appropriate menu of academic and vocational options in key stage 4 and the sixth form. In a very few cases, pupils follow a few courses that do not match their interests or abilities closely enough. The school condenses its key stage 3 curriculum into two years and begins key stage 4 courses in Year 9. This gives pupils longer to study their courses in key stage 4. This arrangement restricts pupils' learning experiences in a few areas such as modern foreign languages, creative subjects and ICT.

Leaders have recently worked closely with staff in partner primary schools to develop beneficial strategies to ensure smooth curricular progression from Year 6 to Year 7. This work is beginning to secure consistent, beneficial approaches to the development of pupils' skills across key stage 2 and key stage 3, particularly in their extended writing.

Teachers have worked imaginatively as part of the 'Lead Creative School Project' to provide pupils with a range of stimulating activities. These include a project for pupils struggling with their literacy to produce an app to support other pupils' writing and

oracy skills. The school is beginning to explore beneficial links between departments. For example, the art, English, religious studies and science departments work together creatively to plan the 'Darwin project'. In this, pupils are encouraged to emulate Darwin's approach, sketching organisms from their local environment and investigating how their adaptations help them survive.

Recently, leaders have strengthened their approach to the development of pupils' literacy skills, especially their writing. As a result, a majority of departments provide a wide range of beneficial opportunities for pupils to write at length. In addition, teachers provide worthwhile opportunities to develop pupils' oracy skills during 'no pen days'. The school has effective systems to identify and support pupils who have weak reading and numeracy skills. However, the school does not have fully developed plans to improve pupils' higher order reading skills across the curriculum. Planning for the progressive development of pupils' numeracy skills across the curriculum is generally suitable. However, pupils are not offered opportunities to solve problems using their numeracy skills frequently enough. Planning for the development of pupils' ICT skills across the curriculum is at an early stage.

There is a wide range of beneficial opportunities for pupils to extend their learning outside of the classroom. These include visits to universities, camping expeditions to Morfa bay and a club to provide opportunities for more able pupils to develop their investigation skills

Most pupils are entered for a Welsh language qualification at the end of key stage 4. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills outside of Welsh lessons.

Care, support and guidance: Good

Hawthorn High School is a caring, supportive community. It has an inclusive ethos that impacts strongly on pupils' wellbeing.

The school has comprehensive systems for tracking and monitoring the progress and wellbeing of pupils, including those with special educational needs. This allows the school to identify effectively pupils who require further support and provide a range of useful interventions. The school provides strong support for vulnerable pupils by working in partnership with a range of specialist health and support services.

There are suitable procedures for tracking and monitoring attendance. Progress leaders use a range of appropriate strategies and interventions to encourage pupil attendance.

The provision to support pupils with special educational needs is a strength of the school and ensures that these pupils make strong progress. The school identifies individual pupils' needs successfully, including through highly effective transition processes. Individual education plans are comprehensive and include well-considered strategies to help teachers support these pupils in their learning. The school provides a wide range of interventions that benefit these pupils' wellbeing and their social and emotional needs through the 'HIVE' nurture centre. These include one to one sessions and 'quiet' time.

The school communicates appropriately with parents through newsletters and social media and provides them with useful information about their child's achievements through an app. Annual and interim reports keep parents suitably informed about their child's progress and their targets for improvement. However, these reports are not always clear enough.

There is a comprehensive and well-planned personal, social and health education programme for key stage 3 pupils, which promotes their personal, social, physical and emotional health well. This includes worthwhile enrichment days and work with outside agencies and organisations such as Llamau, the Samaritans, Hafan Cymru and Welsh Hearts. However, this provision for key stage 4 and sixth form pupils is not sufficiently comprehensive.

There are appropriate opportunities for pupils to develop their spiritual and moral values and beliefs through purposeful morning assemblies, relevant 'Thought for the Day' registration sessions and beneficial activities in a few subject areas. For example, they address issues around euthanasia and discuss the concept of forgiveness in religious studies lessons.

The school provides pupils with beneficial opportunities to develop their understanding of how eating, drinking and lifestyle choices can impact on their physical and mental health. There is a wide range of extra-curricular sporting activities such as rugby, football and hockey. In addition, activities such as Doodlewear creation, theatre visits and the highly successful annual school production develop pupils' creative skills well.

The school provides effective opportunities for pupils to develop their leadership skills and to participate in decision making processes. These include the School Council, iCommittees, the Leadership Group, Eco-Committee, Healthy Schools Group and Anti-Bullying ambassadors.

There is suitable provision to support pupils when moving to the next stage in their education, training or employment. Arrangements for transition from cluster primary schools are thorough and help pupils settle quickly into the school. Activities such as the 'Enterprise Day' led by local businesses and the 'Science Fayre' raise pupils' expectations of future careers well.

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

Leadership and management: Good

Since her appointment in May 2019, the acting headteacher has established a clear vision with ambitious strategic aims that meet the needs of pupils and the local community. She is committed to creating a true community school that fulfils its motto 'Health, Happiness, Success'. Her vision is to raise the aspirations of all pupils so that they reach their potential through hard work, and by gaining valuable learning experiences, knowledge and skills during their time at school. During her short time as acting headteacher, she has galvanised the staff and created a strong team ethos during a period of uncertainty because of potential school re-organisation. She has worked productively with staff and leaders to improve self-evaluation processes and identify key areas for improvement.

The senior leadership team work together well. They communicate the school's vision and strategic aims clearly and consistently to staff, pupils and parents. They set high expectations and model professional values and attitudes in their work. Staff appreciate the support and encouragement provided to them by senior leaders and are committed to working towards the school's strategic aims. Supportive and assured leadership has led to strong pupil outcomes and wellbeing, and positive attitudes to learning.

Senior leaders have clear job descriptions and their responsibilities are shared equitably and understood by staff. Middle leaders understand their roles and how they contribute to delivering the school's strategic priorities. In order to achieve these priorities, senior leaders have strengthened lines of accountability across the school. There are regular, purposeful meetings between middle leaders and their line managers. In most cases, these meetings have clear, agreed agendas and leaders monitor action points robustly. These arrangements are effective in challenging and supporting the work of most curriculum areas and pastoral work.

Governors are knowledgeable, experienced and fully committed to ensuring the success and progress of the school. They are extremely supportive and loyal to the school and its community, but also challenge leaders effectively. They have a secure and realistic understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are actively involved in suitable quality assurance activities and this provides them with a valuable overview of the life and work of the school.

Leaders have recently strengthened self-evaluation and improvement planning processes. The school uses a comprehensive range of activities to monitor its work. Leaders' ability to analyse accurately the performance outcomes at key stage 4 is a strong feature. They conduct lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work as part of useful departmental reviews and insightful whole-school thematic reviews. However, leaders do not always give enough consideration to the progress pupils make or to the quality and suitability of teachers' planning and delivery when evaluating lessons and monitoring pupils' work. Evaluations tend to be too generous and overly focus on pupils' attitudes to learning and teachers' compliance with the school's assessment policy.

Overall, leaders use the information from self-evaluation well to identify clear priorities for school improvement, which are set out in school and departmental development plans. These plans are generally clear and purposeful. Leaders monitor progress towards meeting their priorities rigorously.

The school has a strong culture of professional learning. There are many beneficial development opportunities for staff that support the school's ambition to be a continuously improving organisation. For example, a few middle leaders join the extended leadership team and lead on strategic areas, and a few staff have developed valuable expertise in training and supporting new teachers. Senior leaders are also provided with worthwhile opportunities to support leaders in other schools.

Nearly all staff participate in a range of useful training on topics including aspects of behaviour management and effective teaching strategies. These support school priorities well. There are regular opportunities for staff to share their professional

learning experiences and good practice, for example in action research group meetings, twilight training sessions and helpful 'Teach Trail' activities where staff visit each other's lessons.

The school has a wide network of useful partnerships that contributes to professional learning. This is a strength of the school. For example, there is an annual training day with cluster primary schools to share good practice to improve pupils' basic skills. A few teachers develop their leadership skills well by undertaking lead roles within the regional school network.

The school is increasingly holding underperforming staff to account and provides them with appropriate support. Performance management arrangements are generally robust and appropriately focused on improving pupils' standards and the quality of provision. They include challenging targets and identify suitable professional development requirements.

The school has had a significant budget deficit for over five years. Leaders have succeeded in making substantial efficiencies this year. The acting headteacher and governing body work closely with the local authority to plan and monitor spending and there is a licensed plan to reduce the deficit. The governing body balances effectively the need to eliminate the deficit against ensuring appropriate resources in order to provide good educational experiences for pupils.

The school has attracted investment to build a gym and refurbish the swimming pool. These are valuable facilities that are also used by the local community. The school makes creative use of the available space to enhance pupils' learning and wellbeing, for example by the development of the HIVE nurture centre for vulnerable pupils and a sixth form study area.

The school makes good use of grant funding. The pupil development grant funds a wide range of suitable support for vulnerable pupils, such as out of school hours academic support. This has had a positive impact on the outcomes for pupils eligible for free school meals. Other grants fund appropriate intervention programmes to improve pupils' basic skills and support for staff to develop the curriculum in preparation for the reforms in Wales.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit a broad sample of classes, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body, information on pupils' wellbeing, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

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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