# A report on

# St Cyres Comprehensive School
# Sully Road
# Penarth
# CF64 2XP

# Date of inspection:  January 2020

# by

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

## About St Cyres Comprehensive School

St. Cyres Comprehensive School is an English-medium 11 to 18 comprehensive school situated in Penarth, in the Vale of Glamorgan.  There are 1,157 pupils on roll, which is lower than the number at the time of the last inspection in May 2013.  Of these, 164 are in the sixth form compared with 218 at the time of the last inspection.

The school draws pupils from Penarth, Dinas Powys and Llandough, as well as an increasing number of pupils from Barry and Cardiff.  There are 16.4% of pupils eligible for free school meals, which is the same as the national average, and over 28% live in the 20% most deprived areas of Wales.  More than 19% have a special educational need which is lower than the national average of 22.2%.  Just over 2% have a statement for that need which is in line with the national average.

Very few pupils speak Welsh as a first language or to an equivalent standard. However, nearly 26% of pupils do not have English or Welsh as their first language.

The acting headteacher was appointed in September 2019.  The rest of the senior leadership team comprises of an acting deputy headteacher, three assistant headteachers and an acting assistant headteacher.

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

St Cyres is a caring and inclusive school where the wellbeing of all pupils and staff is supported well.  Purposeful working relationships with their teachers help the majority of pupils to develop suitably their knowledge, understanding and skills.  Over the past three years, performance at key stage 4 has fluctuated though overall the progress pupils make is close to what might be expected.

The majority of teachers have high expectations of their pupils and plan lessons carefully, though in a minority of cases teaching is not effective enough.  This does not help pupils to make the progress expected or develop their literacy and numeracy skills as well as they should.

The school's leaders are committed to caring for and supporting all pupils.  Recently, there has been limited continuity and stability in leadership.  Over a longer period of time, leadership has not had enough, sustained impact on improving provision and standards.

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

## Recommendations

R1  Raise standards including pupils' literacy and numeracy skills

R2  Improve teaching and assessment

R3  Improve leadership at all levels including the precision of self-evaluation and improvement planning

R4  Improve provision for and standards in Welsh

## 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

In lessons, the majority of pupils make appropriate progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills.  They recall suitably prior learning such as crime and punishment in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, conditions in a rainforest and aspects of photosynthesis.  Generally, these pupils apply their knowledge suitably in familiar and unfamiliar situations.  A few make strong progress when, for example, developing their understanding of perspective in photography and the escalation of events in the Irish Rebellion.  However, a minority of pupils who are not secure in their recall of topics and the few who do not complete tasks, make limited progress.

Many pupils listen well to their teachers and a majority do so to each other.  A majority are able and willing to provide brief, factual, verbal responses to the teacher's questions on topics such as coastal erosion, but few offer sustained and well supported responses.  A minority of pupils provide clear explanations on topics such as the forming of condensation.  A few pupils, most frequently in the sixth form, use a wide vocabulary to enhance thoughtful verbal responses when, for example, discussing the veracity of historical sources and whether youth culture is a working-class phenomenon.  However, a minority of pupils demonstrate a lack of confidence and find it difficult to express their ideas clearly.

Many pupils make extensive and effective use of the school's broad range of technology to read for information.  They locate relevant information on topics including the work of prison reformers such as John Howard, Sir George Paul and Elizabeth Fry, the cause and effect of tsunamis and Christian and Muslim attitudes to capital punishment.  In addition, around half use basic inference to improve their understanding of characters for instance, in novels by Dahl.  A minority use higher order reading skills well when, for example, considering the poetry of Duffy, Larkin and Pugh.  However, overall, a minority of pupils do not use a sufficient range of reading strategies to support their learning in different subjects.  A few pupils do not have a wide enough vocabulary to always understand well enough what they read which creates a ceiling to their attainment.

Many pupils write for a suitable range of purposes such as speeches to persuade people to live healthy lives, narrative pieces and explanations of how volcanoes and earthquakes differ at constructive and destructive boundaries.  Generally, they have a secure sense of purpose but often do not demonstrate a similarly sound sense of audience.  As a result, they make incorrect language choices and their writing lacks the correct tone.  Around half of pupils consistently produce writing that is technically secure and structured suitably.  However a similar proportion continue to make too many basic errors such as confusing tense and writing in subordinate clauses rather than in full sentences.  They do not proof read or take enough responsibility for improving the quality of their work before they hand it to their teacher.

Around half of pupils have appropriate basic number skills and make confident use of those skills in different subjects.  They are secure in their basic calculations and have a firm grasp of decimals, fractions and percentages.  Most of these pupils produce

useful, accurate graphs to demonstrate, for instance, how the mean mass of a product changes according to temperature, and how the glucose concentration of a solution affects the amount of light that passes through it. However, a minority of pupils produce graphs that lack precision, have keys missing and which are not used to draw any meaningful conclusions. Around half of pupils struggle to apply their mathematical skills to real-life problems. They do not have a secure enough understanding of mathematical concepts or have not been given enough opportunities to apply their mathematical skills in meaningful contexts across the curriculum. A few pupils make fundamental errors while using a calculator to complete basic tasks.

Pupils develop their information and communication technology (ICT) skills well across the curriculum, when, for example, using digital technologies to design and create advertising apps and talking animation. In addition, pupils use time lapse photography, coding and numeracy skills to replicate the drawings of Picasso.

In general, pupils develop their creativity appropriately through, for example, their involvement in drama, working with clay and the composition of music. The majority of pupils work well with each other such as when communicating artistic intention in drama and discussing the United Kingdom's relationship with the European Union (EU) and The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in history.

Only a very few pupils achieve a level 2 qualification in Welsh, and in general, pupils' Welsh language skills are underdeveloped. In key stage 3, many pupils make suitable progress in developing their language skills in lessons. A majority have sound pronunciation when speaking Welsh and have a suitable grasp of vocabulary. A very few more able pupils produce extended pieces of writing varying sentence starters and including idioms.

Over the period 2016-2018, performance at key stage 4 fluctuated and fell overall but generally compared favourably with that in similar schools. In 2019, performance remains slightly better than in similar schools and in many cases boys and girls performed better than their counterparts in those schools. However, the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals does not compare well with that of the same group of learners elsewhere. Many pupils completed the skills challenge certificate. Nearly all progress to education, employment or training on leaving school.

In the sixth form, the overall completion of courses is well above the national average. The proportion of sixth form pupils gaining three A\*-C, and three A\*-A grades at A level or equivalent, over the three year period 2016-2018, compares well with levels in similar schools. Over the last three years, the performance of pupils in the sixth form is generally close to expectation when compared with that of pupils who have a similar level of prior attainment.

**Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good**

Nearly all pupils benefit from the calm and nurturing environment at St Cyres. As a result, they feel safe and valued. They develop strong, trusting working relationships with staff and peers, and have a secure understanding of the range of support and guidance available to them.

Pupils contribute well to the development of the school through the school council and other committees. Where opportunities arise, pupils take on leadership roles and responsibilities enthusiastically. This includes acting as 'digital leaders' who provide training and assistance to staff and pupils on ICT related issues. They have also taken a key role in the interview process for ICT support technicians.

Pupils develop well as ethical and informed citizens. Their work in the student ambassador forum promotes equality, tolerance, sustainability and children's rights very well. They have also presented worthwhile school assemblies regarding gender equality and mental health. Pupils contribute valuably to the local and to the wider community. Many are involved in fund raising activities and have raised substantial sums for a range of local and national charities including those related to mental health and Children in Need.

Many pupils are aware of the importance of healthy eating and have a positive attitude to healthy lifestyles. They apply this understanding constructively to contribute to valid suggestions such as the reintroduction of the whole school sports day. Many pupils take advantage of the extensive offer of extra-curricular activities such as the fitness, badminton and debating clubs.

Most pupils arrive on time to lessons and settle quickly. Many pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They display a positive attitude to their work and have a strong commitment to their learning. The majority of pupils work purposefully and productively with each other, for example when discussing topics such as public punishment up until the nineteenth century.

The attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals has fallen notably over the last two years and is below that of similar schools.

**Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement**

Most teachers foster purposeful and supportive working relationships with their pupils. Many have high expectations of good behaviour and pupil engagement, and have established well-understood routines which create successfully a calm and orderly learning environment. They are good language models who communicate effectively, giving clear instructions and generally explaining concepts well. These teachers ensure that there is an appropriate balance between teacher-led activities and valuable opportunities for pupils to work independently or in small groups.

The majority of teachers plan their lessons carefully. They have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and provide them with a series of demanding tasks that encourage them to think. These teachers provide engaging resources and make effective use of digital technologies to enrich both teaching and learning. They ensure that there is an appropriate pace to the lesson that supports pupil progress well.

In many lessons, teachers monitor pupil progress carefully and make effective use of questioning to determine pupils' recall and knowledge. These teachers provide pupils with useful verbal feedback. A minority of teachers question pupils skilfully. They probe pupils' understanding successfully and challenge them to develop their verbal responses well.

In a minority of instances, teaching is not effective enough. In these lessons, the activities that teachers prepare are not matched well enough to pupils' abilities. These teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve or they do not consolidate pupils' learning well enough before moving on to the next stage of learning. As a result, pupils are either not challenged well enough or they find tasks too difficult. This leads to a slow pace of learning and pupils making only limited progress. In a minority of instances, teachers do not provide pupils with sufficient opportunities to develop their literacy and numeracy skills progressively in worthwhile contexts.

A minority of teachers provide pupils with constructive written feedback outlining successes and what they need to do to improve. They ensure that pupils respond appropriately to their guidance and improve their work as a result. However, in a majority of instances, teachers' written feedback is not precise or they do not ensure that pupils respond suitably to their comments.

The school's curriculum at key stage 3 is appropriate and strong links with feeder primary schools ensure that it builds well on prior learning. The key stage 4 curriculum includes a suitable range of academic and vocational courses that lead to nearly all pupils progressing to post-16education or training. However, at key stage 4, the school does not make appropriate provision for the development of pupils' Welsh language skills. There is a broad range of A level courses and a few relevant vocational courses available to pupils who opt to study in the sixth form.

The school provides pupils with worthwhile enrichment activities including curriculum visits to the Houses of Parliament and the Senedd, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, and overseas trips to Paris and Washington.

The school plans a generally appropriate range of opportunities for the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. A range of baseline data is used to track progress and a programme of helpful interventions is in place to provide additional support for pupils who have weak basic skills. However, the provision for the progressive development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills overall is too variable across the curriculum. A minority of numeracy tasks are either contrived or do not offer an appropriate level of challenge for all pupils. There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to develop their problem solving skills within mathematics. The marking and assessment of pupils' literacy is inconsistent and does not have sufficient impact on pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar.

There is a wide range of valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their ICT skills across the curriculum including the use of green screen technology, the programming of robotic spheres and the application of shot tracking software.

The school seeks to promote Welsh culture and identity through a suitable range of activities including Diwrnod Shwmae, Welsh Language Music Day and residential extra-curricular visits to Llangrannog and Glan-llyn. However, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills in lessons other than Welsh lessons or around the school.

**Care, support and guidance:  Good**

St Cyres Comprehensive School is a caring and inclusive community that provides effective support and guidance for pupils.  This has a positive impact on their wellbeing, learning and personal development.

The school has comprehensive systems to track the wellbeing of all groups of pupils.  It works well with a wide range of agencies to ensure pupils receive beneficial support and guidance.  Procedures to identify and track all groups of pupils who are at risk of underachieving are at an early stage of development and it is too early to measure their impact.

There are suitable systems to promote good attendance and robust processes to deal with any instances of bullying.  There is an effective reward system that records both positive attitudes to learning and behaviour incidents in lessons.  The school's procedures for monitoring behaviour and tackling the few issues that arise are highly effective.  Parents value the daily communication of their child's behaviours via a well-planned online app which initiates helpful, informed conversations at home.

The school promotes equality and diversity well and encourages pupils to develop as ethically informed citizens.  It provides a wide range of beneficial opportunities for them to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural knowledge.  This includes pupils identifying themes for reflection such as respect, visits to a local nursing home and special school, and 'Thinking Thursday' where pupils reflect on various issues such as civil rights and global warming.

The school works closely with parents to support pupils' healthy eating and drinking, their emotional health and wellbeing, and ensuring they stay safe online.  In addition, pupils are offered a wide range of worthwhile extra-curricular opportunities including a wellbeing club, school productions and a computer game club, to broaden their knowledge and experiences.

Pupils benefit from a useful range of opportunities to develop as leaders within the school and wider community.  This includes establishing and running a community football club, a joint cluster school council and through ambassador and mentoring roles.  These activities contribute well to the development of pupils' consideration and understanding of others along with personal reflection of their own values and responsibilities.

Leaders regularly seek pupils' opinions and respond to their concerns and ideas well.  This has contributed to a review and revision of the behaviour for learning policy, the teaching and learning policy and the development of cycle storage.  Regular reports to parents provide useful information regarding their child's attendance and progress.  In a very few cases targets for improvement are not sufficiently clear.

The school identifies and supports successfully those pupils who need additional support in their learning.  Staff, parents and pupils are involved in the production of helpful individual education plans.  The plans which contain clear targets and strategies for teachers to support the pupils, are reviewed regularly and shared beneficially with staff and parents.

Transition arrangements with feeder primary schools to support wellbeing, are very effective for all groups of pupils and tailored to individual needs. As a result, staff know the pupils very well and pupils settle quickly into their new school.

Pupils are provided with appropriate advice and guidance to help them make informed decisions about their future learning and career choices. This includes specialist advice for pupils with special educational needs.

Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

**Leadership and management: Adequate and needs improvement**

Leaders promote a clear vision and commitment to an inclusive, caring and supportive learning environment where there is a strong emphasis on fostering the wellbeing of all pupils and staff. Over time, however, leadership at all levels has not had a sufficient or sustained impact on improving provision and raising standards. Over the last six months, there has been a lack of stability in leadership arrangements. At present, three members of the leadership team including the headteacher do not have permanent roles and overall there is limited leadership experience among the team.

The acting headteacher provides reflective and supportive leadership. He has a clear understanding of the immediate challenges the school faces, in particular to raise standards and improve pupils' skills. Together with the leadership team, he has established an open, engaging culture where colleagues' views are valued and welcomed. Staff are encouraged to work collaboratively and feel empowered to be leaders and innovators in their areas.

Leaders at all levels understand clearly their roles and responsibilities to address the school's priorities, in particular to support the wellbeing and progress of all pupils. There are suitable and evolving line management arrangements. Increasingly, meetings at all levels focus primarily and appropriately on monitoring pupils' progress, identifying those who are underachieving and implementing suitable interventions to support improvement. The effectiveness of middle leaders, however, varies too much. A minority do not have high enough expectations for the quality of teaching learning, and assessment in their areas. Over time, senior leaders have not challenged these staff robustly enough to improve this aspect of their work.

There are suitable systems to manage the performance of staff. Personal objectives relate well to professional standards and address school priorities directly. There are valuable opportunities for staff to consider and identify relevant professional learning activities that support these objectives and personal career aspirations. Leaders encourage and support staff well to participate in a broad range of professional learning activities. The school works productively with a range of partners to promote effective practice in teaching and learning.

The school has recently introduced an appropriate calendar of self-evaluation activities. Leaders use relevant performance and progress information to help identify particular areas for improvement within faculties and across the school. The school has begun to develop appropriate processes to evaluate teaching and learning. However, lesson observations do not focus closely enough on pupils'

progress and the impact of teaching on their learning.  Work scrutiny does not focus directly on the quality of pupils' learning and the development of their skills.  School and faculty improvement plans identify valid priorities for development.  However, initiatives to support improvements, particularly in relation to skills, teaching and learning are not precise enough.

The governing body has a sound understanding of the school's performance, its strengths and current improvement priorities.  Governors show a strong commitment to the school and support particular aspects of its work well.  They promote the school's inclusive and caring culture, help determine its strategic direction and challenge leaders appropriately over specific aspects of its work.  The governing body together with the headteacher and the director of finance manage the school's resources carefully.  Resources are allocated appropriately to identified school and departmental priorities.

Despite these strengths, leaders have not been successful in addressing national priorities effectively.  There has not been sufficient progress in reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment, promoting the development of pupils' Welsh language skills and strengthening pupils' literacy and numeracy skills.

## 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.