



Report summary for parents and carers on Cardiff Sixth Form College

Date of inspection: November 2023

by Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

Summary

Pupils at Cardiff Sixth Form College achieve exceptionally high public examination results and progress onto highly competitive courses at universities, both in the UK and globally. The school has strong leadership that oversees the implementation of an appropriate curriculum, highly effective teaching, and strong pastoral care. The school meets all of the Independent School Standards (Wales) 2003 to maintain its registration.

Main evaluation

The principal and senior leaders have a very clear vision for Cardiff Sixth Form College. They aim to provide a high-quality holistic education, leading to academic success, in a supportive environment that develops rounded pupils ready for their next stage in learning.

The principal has high expectations of the whole school community, who in turn trust and respect him. These expectations are clearly communicated. Staff at all levels are held accountable for the quality of their work and are also given the autonomy to consider how best to fulfil their responsibilities. Senior leaders have a very clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development across the school. The principal's recent allocation of additional teaching and learning responsibilities to staff reflects the areas identified for school improvement and supports both whole-school and individual staff development.

Nearly all pupils are exceptionally diligent both in class and when working independently. They settle quickly to tasks, listen attentively and actively engage in their learning. Pupil behaviour is exemplary, and they demonstrate a burning desire to succeed. Nearly all pupils are confident and greatly value the opportunity to work with and alongside other high attaining pupils, who share their same industrious work ethic. Working relationships with staff are strong, positive and focused. Pupils work well in small groups when given the opportunity. They are supportive and keen to share constructive feedback with their peers in a mutually respectful manner.

The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum appropriate to the needs, interests, and ambitions of its pupils. Lessons and sequences of lessons are supported with carefully selected and designed resources. As a result, pupils have a clear idea of what and how they are learning.

The school's curriculum encourages pupils to understand their place in the world and to be aware of their own and other cultures. Pupils benefit from personal social health education (PSHE), which supports their understanding of how to build and maintain positive relationships, how to maintain a healthy lifestyle and how to remain safe when online. Regular assemblies, often led by pupils, support and build upon the strong culture of inclusion and diversity within the school. For example, one assembly led by pupils celebrated World Kindness Day and led to pupils performing 'random acts of kindness' for one another. A valuable range of external speakers visits the school,

such as local police officers, the Brook Cymru, which helps pupils develop an understanding of current societal issues.

Alongside its subject-level curriculum, the school provides pupils with highly effective support for university entry through a well-developed and extensive super-curricular programme. This is a strength of the school. Pupils are provided with tailored advice, guidance and development opportunities directly relevant to their future plans and ambitions. For example, pupils who plan to study medicine receive support and advice with entrance examinations, as well as work observation opportunities and interview practice.

Cameo

The school provides highly effective support for university entry and future career planning through a well-developed and extensive super-curricular programme.

This program of support and provision aims to help each individual pupil identify the best destination and course for them. Activities are designed to equip them with the skills and habits to succeed in their studies and university life more broadly and maximise their chances of gaining a place on their chosen course. As a result, a very high proportion of pupils go on to highly competitive courses and institutions, both in the UK and globally.

Teaching at the school is founded on a shared culture of ambition and of high expectations of both staff and pupils. As a result of highly effective teaching and a well-planned, appropriate curriculum, nearly all pupils at the school achieve exceptionally high public examination results and progress on to highly competitive courses at universities in the UK and globally.

Nearly all teachers develop strong, constructive, trusting relationships with their pupils. As a result, the school is a calm, industrious and friendly learning environment in which pupils quickly develop a secure sense of belonging and purpose. Teachers are enthusiastic, highly effective advocates for their subjects and have exceptional levels of subject knowledge.

Nearly all teachers make effective use of questioning to confirm pupils' understanding. In around half of cases, questioning allows for exploration and development of ideas and, as a result, pupils make rapid progress in the breadth and depth of their understanding. In a few cases, questioning only requires brief answers from pupils and opportunities for discussion and development of speaking skills are missed.

Teachers make highly effective use of verbal feedback to enable pupils to improve their work and further their learning. Across the school, there are a few examples of strong written feedback to drive progress.

Teachers make comprehensive use of internal assessment outcomes to inform their teaching. This underpins pupils' detailed awareness of their current and projected attainment, and of how they can improve. As a result, they build their knowledge and understanding securely and effectively over time. Pupils and parents are kept informed regarding progress via regular, detailed reports.

Pastoral staff and leaders make effective use of data to target, plan and implement interventions for individual pupils. For example, pupils identified as needing extra academic support have tailored adjustments made to their timetables to include support sessions. The additional learning needs co ordinator (ALNCo) provides staff with helpful information regarding any pupil identified as requiring additional support. This information includes purposeful strategies for teachers, which they routinely employ within lessons enabling nearly all pupils to achieve highly. Furthermore, staff identify pupils who may benefit from adjustments to the public examinations swiftly. As a result, pupils are supported to achieve strong outcomes.

Leaders are developing suitable processes to assess the starting points and potential of all pupils joining the school more accurately. This information is beginning to be used to identify pupils who may require additional support or benefit from further challenge. In addition, the school is beginning to use the data to benchmark and validate the progress made by individuals and to tailor all pupils' wider educational experience to meet their ambitions and needs.

Supported by the excellent language modelling of their teachers, pupils, many for whom English is an additional language, are articulate and confident when discussing their learning. They readily assimilate and communicate complex ideas using high-level vocabulary, and are adept at summarising these in writing, especially when taking notes. A few pupils are less confident when using discussion to explore and develop, rather than recount, ideas, especially in whole-class settings. The school recognises this and has put in place valuable provision. This includes a critical speaking course, extensive opportunities for formal and informal debate, and preparation for university interviews. However, teachers and leaders are in the early stages of implementing a consistent, whole-school approach to the development of oracy skills.

Numeracy and mathematical skills are integrated throughout the curriculum at an exceptionally high level. Nearly all pupils have highly developed mathematical skills, which they deploy to good effect in a variety of contexts. Pupils throughout the school use their writing skills effectively for a variety of purposes. Nearly all pupils display high levels of confidence and aptitude when using technology to aid their learning.

Pastoral support for pupils at the school is highly effective and, as a result, nearly all pupils feel safe at school, and have high levels of well-being and outstanding attitudes to learning.

Pupils' development as rounded individuals with a wide range of interests and enthusiasms is supported effectively by the school through a variety of co-curricular opportunities, in particular by the school house system. Through this system, pupils develop relationships and build friendships

with pupils beyond their classes, year groups and boarding or day houses. This develops a sense of collective and personal responsibility.

The school offers an extensive range of leadership opportunities for pupils in all year groups. These leadership roles have clearly defined purposes, which are often linked to wider school development priorities. For example, A Level pupils act as 'reading mentors' to support lower school pupils to settle into school life quickly and develop their academic reading skills. Pupils take great pride in being appointed to such positions, respect these responsibilities, and value building collaborative working relationships with staff. As a result, most pupils feel listened to and that their opinions are valued.

Heads of Houses co-ordinate the pastoral support for pupils tightly and are often the first point of contact for both pupils and staff if they should have any concerns. Pupils benefit from ready access to a wide range of professionals, including registered nurses, mental health first aiders, a full-time well-being officer and the recently appointed LGBTQ+ ambassador. Pupils can self-refer to these professionals and, as a result, feel confident that they can speak to staff about any matters of concern. They trust that staff responses will be rapid, appropriate and helpful. The pastoral team monitor pupil well-being through a range of regular and purposeful meetings and through annual pupil well-being surveys. As a result, high levels of pupil well being underpin their readiness and ability to learn and the very high levels of academic success that nearly all pupils achieve.

Senior leaders have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development across the school. This has resulted in an extensive three-year school development plan. While the areas for improvement are all relevant, the length of the plan makes it difficult for leaders and the wider school community to clearly identify key priorities for the current academic year and ensure that they achieve these goals. Progress with many actions arising from the plan, particularly relating to ensuring consistency in the quality of provision, are in the early stages. Quality assurance and self-evaluation processes are in an early stage of development and frequently focus on compliance rather than the impact of provision on the quality of teaching and learning.

The school accesses a wide range of professional learning opportunities for both teaching and non-teaching staff through the proprietor's 'Learning Hub'. There are also more informal opportunities for staff to share good practice such as the 'virtual coffee mornings' for safeguarding leads. A few staff have successfully accessed these courses, most frequently developing their leadership skills. In addition, the school is beginning to develop a programme of internal professional learning opportunities. These opportunities combine to enable staff to carry out their roles effectively and contribute to the strong outcomes for pupils.

Governors ensure that the school complies with the independent school standards and fulfil their statutory duties. They oversee the leadership and management of the school and scrutinise school finances effectively. The designated safeguarding governor receives weekly safeguarding reports and works with the compliance governor to quality assure the work of the school in this important

area. Governors monitor the work of the school closely, including a recent focus on the well-being of staff and pupils and learning walks to review the quality of teaching. Overall, governors have a sound understanding of the outcomes achieved by pupils, the quality of teaching and future strategic plans for the school.

Staff and senior leaders have clear job descriptions. However, the roles and responsibilities at directorate and governance level are less clear. Whilst leaders and governors clearly articulate the value they add to the work of the school, there are no terms of reference for this group, and it is not clear what the boundary of their role is. The involvement of governors in the day to day running of the school results in a lack of autonomy for senior leaders and reduces the capacity of the governing body to act as a critical friend.

Governors and senior staff have a sound oversight of safeguarding. Staff, including administrative, teaching and governors, all receive relevant safeguarding training. Staff record and monitor pupil attendance continually throughout the day and processes for following up on any pupil absences are effective. Safeguarding leads' record keeping is robust and in the very few cases, where it is appropriate, they work suitably with external agencies. As a result, leaders have developed a sound culture of safeguarding within the school.

Recommendations

We have made three recommendations to help the school continue to improve:

- R1** Strengthen the school's current practices to ensure that roles and responsibilities at directorate and governing body level are clearly defined
- R2** Strengthen and refine self-evaluation and quality assurance processes to ensure that leaders focus clearly on the impact of provision on the quality of teaching and learning
- R3** Ensure that plans for school improvement are manageable and focus sharply on the most important areas

Compliance with the regulations for registration

Independent school inspections are governed by the Education Act 2002 and related regulations: the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. These regulations require an independent school to meet an appropriate standard in the following areas:

The quality of education provided by the school

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The suitability of proprietors and staff

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The provision of information

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Safeguarding

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not give any cause for concern.

What happens next

Estyn advises the proprietor to amend its current development plan to show what actions the school intends to take in response to the recommendations. The school must also provide a copy of this report or a summary of it to all parents/carers at the school.

School context

Name of provider	Cardiff Sixth Form College
Proprietor	Owned by Dukes Education Group Ltd
Local authority	Cardiff Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent Secondary Boarding School
Residential provision?	Yes
Number of pupils on roll	372
Pupils of statutory school age	81
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	12/12/2019
Start date of inspection	06/11/2023

Cardiff Sixth Form College is a coeducational boarding school for pupils aged 14 to 19 years. It is a multi-cultural teaching environment, with pupils from over 30 different nationalities studying there. The school is situated near Cardiff city centre in leased premises.

The school is registered to accept up to 380 pupils, and there are currently 372 pupils on roll. Many of these pupils are boarders and many are above statutory school age.

The school applied for inclusion on the Welsh Government list of independent schools to provide additional learning provision for pupils with specific learning needs, namely: dyslexia, dyscalculia and dyspraxia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). In addition, the school has provision for pupils with autistic spectrum conditions, physical impairments and medical conditions.

At the time of the inspection, there are no pupils on roll in receipt of public funding. The school has provided full or partial scholarships for a few pupils.

Since the follow up to registration visit in 2019, there has been a significant increase in the number of pupils of compulsory school age attending the school, from less than 20 to around 80. In addition, the leadership of the school has been restructured. The principal joined Cardiff Sixth Form College as headteacher in 2020 and was appointed principal in spring 2023.

At the time of the inspection, Year 12 and Year 13 pupils were sitting mock examinations and inspectors were therefore unable to observe any of their taught lessons.

This is the school's first core inspection.

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