



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

A report on

**Ffynone House School Trust
36 St James's Crescent
Uplands
SA1 6DR**

Date of inspection: September 2019

by

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

About Ffynone House School Trust

Ffynone House School is a co-educational independent day school for pupils aged from 11 to 18 years. The school was founded in 1973, and since 2012 has been a charitable trust. It is situated in the Uplands area of Swansea. The majority of pupils live in Swansea and the surrounding area ranging from the Gower to Port Talbot.

The school currently has 129 pupils, including 35 students in the sixth form. Overall, there are slightly more boys than girls. The majority of new pupils in Year 7 transfer from a neighbouring independent preparatory school, with the remainder from local primary schools.

The school's admissions policy is to accept pupils where it considers it can meet their educational needs appropriately. Around 5% of pupils have special educational needs.

Around 10% of the school's pupils are from a minority-ethnic or mixed-race background. There are very few pupils for whom English is not their first language. Very few pupils speak Welsh as a first language or to an equivalent standard. The school does not aim to make pupils bilingual in English and Welsh.

The school was last inspected in September 2013. Since that inspection there have been significant changes to the school's leadership team. The headteacher was appointed to this position in September 2015. The current leadership team includes the business manager and an assistant headteacher, both of whom were appointed to these posts in 2017.

Summary

There is a strong sense of community that pervades Ffynone House. Nearly all pupils are proud of their school. They thrive in the calm and engaging atmosphere and benefit from the inclusive, family ethos and the high levels of care and support they receive. Relationships between pupils across the school contribute extremely successfully to pupils' self-belief, security and wellbeing. During their time at Ffynone pupils develop their personal, social and emotional skills assuredly. The confidence they acquire and the standards they achieve prepare them well for further educational opportunities and the experiences of future employment.

The curriculum meets pupils' needs and aspirations well. There is a particularly strong focus on mathematics and science. Learning experiences support pupils to develop their communication skills successfully, for example through opportunities to study a broad range of modern foreign languages and through participation in the performing arts. The supportive and constructive working relationships between teachers and pupils as well as teachers' expertise and passion for their subjects contribute significantly to pupils' progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills.

The headteacher has established a clear vision and values, which are shared by staff, parents and pupils. Leaders and staff promote a nurturing family environment in which most individuals are successful and flourish.

The school meets all of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

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

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.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve the precision of teachers' feedback to pupils and the quality of their responses
- R2 Strengthen arrangements to monitor pupils' progress at key stage 3
- R3 Sharpen processes to monitor and evaluate the impact of improvement strategies

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. It is also advisable to circulate this plan, or a summary of it, to all parents/carers at the school.

Main findings

Standards: Good

The standards that pupils at Ffynone House achieve prepare them well for further educational opportunities and the experiences of future employment. Many pupils show a secure recall of earlier learning. They apply this knowledge successfully in new contexts, for example when explaining the formation of headlands and bays in geography and through their well-developed comprehension skills in French. Many pupils make strong progress in developing their knowledge and understanding in a broad range of areas such as the benefits and criticisms of Liberal social reforms in the early twentieth century. This awareness helps pupils to acquire an appreciation of current social issues and concerns.

Nearly all pupils listen carefully and with respect to teachers' explanations and the ideas of others, for example when considering and questioning the emphasis the media places on an idealised body image. Many speak clearly and confidently when responding to teachers' questions or when discussing and debating particular topics. The majority offer thoughtful, informed and coherent arguments to justify their opinions such as when Year 7 pupils discuss the rights of the child. In their study of Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet', Year 9 pupils draw clear parallels between Romeo's thoughts, words and actions and our present-day understanding of the symptoms of depression. Sixth form pupils studying physical education explain the respiratory system and the process of gaseous exchange using relevant anatomical terms. However, a few pupils do not contribute sufficiently to class discussion. They offer only brief responses and do not explain their ideas fully.

Many pupils read aloud fluently and with suitable expression. Many read well for understanding using a range of strategies such as highlighting and mind-mapping effectively to record and organise information. In history, for example, many Year 8 pupils distinguish between the economic, political and religious causes of the Civil War and reach reasoned conclusions about why Charles 1 was defeated by the Parliamentarians. In English, many Year 11 pupils use their understanding of poetic techniques to analyse successfully the context and themes explored in Robert Browning's 'Porphyria's Lover'.

Many pupils write effectively for a range of purposes, expressing their ideas and understanding clearly using specific literary techniques. The majority present their work neatly using accurate spelling and grammar. By key stage 4, the majority of pupils produce well-structured extended written accounts. They often use sophisticated language, drawing on a range of evidence to support their opinions and reach suitably informed conclusions, for example in English when analysing Macbeth's attitude towards ambition. A few pupils, however, have untidy handwriting or make careless and frequent spelling and grammatical errors. A few pupils do not develop their written accounts well enough and offer only brief responses.

Many pupils develop strong mathematical skills, which they apply successfully in a few subjects such as science and geography. For example, pupils plan and carry out personalised investigations skilfully in science by collecting and measuring relevant

data to reach thoughtful conclusions. In geography, many Year 9 pupils complete accurate scatter graphs, interpreting the data thoughtfully to show the relationship between life expectancy and birth rate, and adult literacy and gross domestic product. By the sixth form, pupils become competent mathematicians who apply their knowledge successfully across different aspects of the subject. For example, they construct mathematical proofs presenting their reasoning clearly and logically.

Most pupils develop their information and communications technology skills suitably. They apply these skills successfully in a range of contexts such as when undertaking personal research into topics of interest in art and German.

Many pupils think carefully to solve specific problems, for example when considering whether the pigs in Animal Farm exploit the other animals or evaluating the conflicting claims to the throne of Mary Tudor and Lady Jane Grey. In art, pupils respond well to challenges using a variety of media, such as pencil sketches or collage using fabric. They experiment enthusiastically with colour, cross-hatching, and different textures of paper to produce imaginative representations of a particular theme.

Over the last three years, there has been an ongoing improvement in performance at key stage 4. Throughout this period, performance in all key indicators has exceeded national averages. In each of the last two years, many pupils have achieved the level 2 threshold (equivalent to five GCSEs at grades A* to C) including English and mathematics. In the last two years, around half of all GCSE entries have been at grades A*/A (or equivalent). In the last three years, there has been a steady improvement in the percentage of pupils achieving five or more passes at the highest A*/A (or equivalent) grades, with the majority of pupils achieving this indicator in 2019. Most pupils with special educational needs make suitable progress from their individual starting points. For the last three years, no pupil has left the school without a recognised qualification.

Pupils' performance at A level over the last three years is strong. During this time, the majority of A level entries were at grades A*-B, and more than 80% of all entries were at grades A*-C. At the end of Year 13, nearly all pupils progress to higher education.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Nearly all pupils are proud of their school. They thrive in the friendly atmosphere and benefit from the inclusive, family ethos and the high levels of support they receive. Across the school, pupils enjoy learning and develop positive working relationships with their teachers. Most pupils feel safe and secure at school. They know who to turn to if they are unhappy and they recognise that the school deals effectively with any concerns they may have.

Both within and beyond the classroom, pupils of all ages interact positively whether at break or lunch times, during extra-curricular activities, and in shared spaces such as the locker room, the dining hall and play areas. Pupils look out for one another with older pupils fostering strong supportive relationships with younger pupils. These relationships contribute extremely successfully to pupils' confidence, security and wellbeing.

Pupil behaviour is consistently good. In lessons, nearly all pupils demonstrate mutual respect both for their peers and their teachers. They listen well to one another and consider the views and ideas of other pupils carefully. Most pupils are attentive and engage fully in their learning with the majority showing considerable pride in their work.

The majority of pupils have a secure understanding of how eating and drinking can affect their health. They recognise the benefits of regular exercise. Many pupils participate enthusiastically in a range of physical activities, such as football, netball, dance, tennis and fitness training, either as part of the school's extra-curricular programme or at community sports clubs. There are high levels of participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. The majority of pupils demonstrate a sound understanding of mental health issues. For example, Year 9 pupils suggest a range of self-help strategies to address personal experiences of feeling 'down'.

A minority of pupils across the school develop their leadership and communication skills successfully through their involvement in specific community activities. For example, pupils work together effectively in the Year 12 team-building day or take part in the mock general election as well as supporting younger pupils through the peer-mentoring programme. Pupils influence the life of the school in a variety of ways, such as through their contribution to the school council or by offering their ideas and opinions in regular pupil surveys. Through this work, pupils have contributed to improvements in the canteen menu and to the renovation of the locker rooms, boys' toilets and sixth-form common room.

Most pupils understand and respect people from other backgrounds and traditions. A minority of pupils are proactive in raising awareness, for example through pupil-led assemblies of particular social and ethical issues, such as the UNICEF Rights of the Child, and international refugee crises. A few pupils engage enthusiastically in fundraising activities and community work such as collecting clothing for a community café and raising money for a cancer charity. In addition, the majority of pupils perform or assist backstage in the school's annual school musical production. This involvement contributes well to pupils' personal development and helps foster a strong sense of inclusion and team spirit within the school community.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

The school provides a curriculum that is broad and balanced and meets the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

The curriculum is tailored well to the needs of individual pupils. There is a suitable range of option subjects available at GCSE and A level. A strong feature of the school's provision is the range of languages offered including French, German and Latin. In addition, the school promotes the performing arts and particularly science and mathematics, including through an accelerated mathematics pathway at key stage 4.

The curriculum provides beneficial opportunities for all pupils, including those in the sixth form, to take part in regular physical activity. In addition, older pupils frequently join staff in participating in activities such as circuit training. As part of their activity days, tutor groups participate in a range of physical pursuits such as paddle boarding and rock climbing.

The school offers a valuable range of activities that enhances pupils' learning experiences. These include workshops with the National Dance Company of Wales, Welsh Debating Championships, Science Olympiads and a structured speech and drama programme.

Leaders are beginning to plan a suitably co-ordinated approach to support pupils to develop their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. There are valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their communication skills across a range of subjects. Pupils have beneficial opportunities to apply their numeracy skills in relevant subject areas, for example when analysing data and using graph skills in physical education and geography.

Teachers plan useful activities to support pupils to use their information and communications technology skills in a suitable range of subjects. For example, pupils use graph-plotting software successfully in mathematics to enhance their understanding of algebraic graphs. However, overall, teachers' planning supports pupils to develop a relatively limited range of information and communications technology skills.

The supportive and constructive working relationships between teachers and pupils contribute significantly to pupils' progress and the standards they achieve. Most teachers show a passion for their subject. They have strong subject expertise and are effective role models.

In many cases, teachers use questioning well to test pupils' recall and to introduce and explore new topics and themes. In a minority of instances, teachers challenge pupils to provide more detailed responses that help them to acquire a deeper understanding of specific aspects.

Many teachers plan a broad range of engaging tasks that helps pupils to build on their earlier learning and extend their knowledge and understanding. These teachers provide clear explanations and often helpful demonstrations to reinforce key principles and model specific techniques. There is a particular emphasis on supporting pupils to develop relevant technical terminology, such as rhythmical structures, tempo and dynamics in music. Many learning activities provide pupils with beneficial opportunities to solve problems and reach suitable solutions and conclusions.

In a few cases, where teaching is less effective, this is because learning activities do not meet the needs of pupils of differing abilities successfully. On occasions, there is a lack of challenge for more able pupils and limited opportunities for pupils to write independently or produce extended accounts.

Most teachers provide supportive and constructive verbal feedback that helps pupils to improve their work. In many cases, feedback recognises pupils' achievement and helps reinforce and extend pupils' understanding. Teachers' written feedback is beginning to assist pupils to refine and improve the quality of their work. In a minority of cases, pupils respond constructively to teachers' advice, for example by developing or refining written accounts or consolidating mathematical operations and solutions. At present, however, this approach is not used consistently.

Care, support and guidance: Good

There is a strong sense of community that pervades the school. Staff and pupils work together well in a close family atmosphere that helps pupils to thrive in their personal, social and emotional development. These aspects contribute significantly to pupils' high levels of wellbeing.

All staff know the pupils extremely well and provide beneficial support and guidance that nurtures strong working relationships. The school's open-door policy and teachers' commitment to provide support to both parents and pupils reinforces these close working relationships. Annual reports to parents are highly personalised and outline pupils' achievements and their attitudes to learning well. Reports also provide parents with helpful detail about how their child can make further improvements in their learning.

The recently-introduced personal, social and health education programme includes interesting units of study such as, healthy eating, ethical shopping and cyberbullying. This programme builds effectively upon ongoing discussions about specific aspects explored during tutor periods. These combined approaches are helping pupils to develop their understanding of healthy-lifestyle choices and to foster their social and emotional skills. In addition, pupils receive helpful guidance when considering future careers or study pathways. In the sixth form, there is a suitable focus on preparing pupils well for future employment opportunities and relevant university applications.

The curriculum promotes healthy lifestyle choices successfully, for example through compulsory physical education for all pupils. This provision is complemented by valuable opportunities to participate in activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. The school provides beneficial support to help pupils understand how they should remain safe online.

Across the curriculum, the school helps pupils to explore and consider issues relating to equality, diversity and disability. For example, in Year 7 drama, when studying 'The Greatest Showman', pupils celebrate diversity and differences in faith and sexuality. In Year 10 English lessons, pupils reflect on issues such as homelessness and zero-hour contracts while studying 'An Inspector Calls'. In addition, pupils develop their understanding of spiritual and ethical beliefs in a range of contexts. For instance, pupils attend an assembly on 'Life as a Muslim in the UK', while as part of their art work they collect plastic items from the beach and consider the ethical issues raised by the need to recycle.

There are many worthwhile opportunities for pupils to take an active role in the life of the school. These include performing in the two annual school productions, which helps develop pupils' spirituality along with their sense of community. This awareness is reinforced during the annual immersive drama residential experience, in which pupils participate enthusiastically. Pupils represent the school by performing in the Abertawe music festival. This helps them to develop their confidence as they perform to a wider public audience. Opportunities provided by entering competitions such as the Welsh debating championships help develop pupils' communication skills and promote their self-esteem successfully. In addition, a few older pupils provide a valuable mentoring support service for younger pupils. Members of the school council take their responsibilities seriously when, for example, deciding what improvements to make to the school environment.

The school gathers a useful range of data about pupils' academic achievement, behaviour and attendance. This information is used assuredly by form tutors who meet with individual pupils to set appropriate learning targets and arrange beneficial support and guidance. However, the use leaders make of this data at a strategic level, particularly to monitor and evaluate pupils' progress in key stage 3, is less well developed.

Pupils with special educational needs receive beneficial support, including personalised timetables where applicable. The school also liaises effectively with external agencies to support the specific learning needs of a few pupils. These arrangements support pupils well in making suitable progress.

Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management: Good

The headteacher has established a clear vision and values, which are shared by staff, parents and pupils. Leaders and staff promote a nurturing family environment in which most individuals are successful and flourish. The headteacher has earned the respect of the staff, and together, leaders have developed a positive and supportive culture that benefits the pupils.

The trustees, along with the governing council, have worked astutely and diligently to provide strong, strategic direction to the school. Governors fulfil their statutory duties efficiently and effectively. They hold leaders to account suitably for the progress that pupils make during their time at the school. The governing council oversees the school estate successfully and manages the school finances prudently.

Recently, there have been changes to the leadership structure to create a senior leadership team. An assistant headteacher and a business manager support the headteacher effectively to lead the school and direct its work. In addition, three temporary leaders have taken responsibility for delivering each of the main school improvement priorities. This initiative has enabled leaders to develop a sense of collegiality and to promote a successful team ethos. There are clear roles and responsibilities, and strong channels of communication. As a result, staff are proud of their school and strive to provide the best learning experiences for their pupils.

Leaders use their evaluations of the school's provision and each department's pupil outcomes thoughtfully, to identify relevant areas for improvement. Leaders plan worthwhile actions to deliver agreed priorities. On occasions, departments focus on specific subject-related improvements that they have identified, and, in addition, teachers work together on whole-school priorities. However, too often plans do not identify success criteria that focus sharply on measurable improvements to pupils' outcomes. This makes it difficult for leaders at all levels to monitor and evaluate the impact of the improvement priorities.

Together, leaders provide good support to improve teachers' classroom practice. For example, staff work collaboratively to refine their use of assessments of pupils' achievements to plan more effective support and additional challenge. In addition, teachers work together to learn from educational research, for instance identifying the most useful methodologies to improve the quality of their teaching. This

approach has helped to promote a strong culture of professional learning. In addition, the school provides appropriate in-house training such as to support teachers to develop their awareness and understanding of mental health problems.

Leaders monitor teachers' work suitably, and hold staff to account appropriately for the quality of their work. Generally, leaders provide staff with helpful and supportive verbal and written feedback about their performance. There are suitable performance management arrangements for teachers that include worthwhile opportunities to identify and address their professional development needs and training. However, the school does not have suitable arrangements to review the performance of teaching assistants, or to provide them with appropriate professional development opportunities.

Leaders make effective use of the school buildings to provide suitable accommodation, although leaders have identified aspects that require renovation. The school makes effective use of a partnership arrangement with Swansea University to enhance pupils' experiences in physical education. There are enough suitably qualified teachers and sufficient resources to deliver the curriculum effectively.

The school complies with all of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from parent and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and support staff 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/proprietor(s), leaders and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work 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 lessons and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning
- 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 had 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 (where appropriate), 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 163 of the Education Act 2002. The main purpose of inspection under this section is to report on compliance with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003. In schools that provide non-maintained nursery education, this report also satisfies the requirements of Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

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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