



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

A report on

**St John Baptist C.I.W. High School
Glan Road
Aberdare
RCT
CF44 8BW**

Date of inspection: January 2020

by

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

About St John Baptist C.I.W. High School

St John Baptist Church in Wales High School is an English-medium, 11 to 18 mixed comprehensive school in Rhondda Cynon Taff. The school is located in Aberdare.

There are 968 pupils on roll, compared with 1,014 pupils at the time of the last inspection in March 2014. There are 157 pupils in the sixth form compared with 234 at the time of the last inspection.

Around 12% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This is below the national average of 16.4% for secondary schools in Wales.

Around 1% of pupils have a statement of special educational needs compared with 2.2% for Wales as a whole. Around 22% of pupils have a special educational need. This is slightly lower than the national average of 22.9%.

Most pupils are from a white British background. Fewer than 1% of pupils are fluent in Welsh. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language.

The headteacher has been in post since 2006. The senior management team also includes a deputy headteacher, two assistant headteachers and one 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 John Baptist Church in Wales High School is an extremely happy, inclusive and enthusiastic learning community. Nearly all pupils have highly positive attitudes towards learning and are proud of their school. Many make strong progress in their lessons and over the past three years performance at key stage 4 has been strong.

Most teachers foster positive working relationships with pupils and know them well. They establish effective routines that help pupils to be ready to learn.

The school provides high quality care, support and guidance that contributes significantly to the exceptional standards of pupil wellbeing. The school works well with parents to ensure they are consulted and informed thoroughly of their child's progress.

Leaders have a clear vision for the school to provide pupils with a high quality education in a caring, supportive Christian environment. Leaders are committed to continuous improvement and review and evaluate their work regularly. Staff feel they are supported well and work effectively to create a warm and welcoming learning environment with a particular emphasis on understanding of and respect for others.

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

Recommendations

- R1 Raise standards and progress in pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, particularly the minority who continue to make basic errors in their writing and have difficulty with their basic number skills.
- R2 Strengthen the teaching in a minority of lessons and improve the impact of feedback.

What happens next

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

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on its work in relation to parental engagement for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main findings

Standards: Good

In lessons, many pupils make strong progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills. They recall prior learning well, such as the factors that affect the reaction of magnesium and hydrochloric acid in science. A majority apply their recall effectively in more challenging contexts for example, when using their knowledge of Pythagoras' theorem to identify right angled triangles. However, a few pupils make limited progress in their learning.

Many pupils listen respectfully and attentively to their teachers and peers. They respond thoughtfully to the contributions of others and follow teachers' instructions precisely.

Many pupils are eager to contribute to class discussions and answer teachers' questions well. They speak clearly and confidently, making appropriate use of sensible and often more sophisticated vocabulary. A minority contribute well to discussions, on for example, the impact of producing palm oil on rainforests, habitats and wildlife. However, a minority of pupils have limited confidence in their verbal skills and offer short underdeveloped responses.

When reading aloud, many pupils do so confidently, vary their tone and read with fluency. Many scan texts suitably to locate information on differing religious faiths and to identify the risks of legal and illegal drugs. They use their research skills well and read a range of texts to develop their knowledge and understanding of topics, for example, when identifying and comparing the benefits of bottle and breast feeding in health and social care. A minority use inference and deduction suitably, for example, when exploring how conflict shapes the characters in the book 'Heroes'.

Many pupils write for a suitable range of purposes and generally have an appropriate understanding of tone and audience. The majority produce writing that is well structured and vary their use of language effectively to engage the audience. They use a comprehensive range of vocabulary and subject specific terminology confidently, such as, when sharing their views on war and propaganda in history. However, a minority of pupils make frequent basic errors, have difficulty structuring and paragraphing their writing, and do not take enough responsibility for proof-reading their work before they hand it in.

Many pupils make effective use of their basic numeracy skills and have a suitable understanding of measurement. Many draw line graphs and bar charts accurately and are able to extract basic information from these graphs, for example, when considering the changes to blood sugar in the human body throughout the day. The majority of pupils have a strong grasp of the four rules of number and use these well to determine percentages, decimals and fractions. They use calculation skills well, such as when finding the depreciation of the value of a car over time. However, a minority of pupils have difficulty with their basic number skills and do not use their numeracy skills well enough across the curriculum.

Many pupils develop their information communication and technology (ICT) skills appropriately in different subjects. A majority employ these skills to work collaboratively with their peers for example when working collaboratively on investigations in science. In a few subjects, pupils make use of more advanced ICT skills, such as when using software to create scale drawings of designs.

Many pupils develop their creative skills well in a range of contexts. They demonstrate strong performance skills including the composition and performance of music using a range of instruments. In art, pupils produce interesting and imaginative artwork, such as, creating patterns and masks when considering the Mexican holiday 'day of the dead'. Other pupils also combine the development of their creative and physical skills well when, for example, displaying posture, stamina and rhythm in performing dance routines they have choreographed.

In 2019 nearly all pupils were entered for a qualification in Welsh and a majority achieved a level 2 qualification. In lessons, the majority of pupils make suitable progress in developing their Welsh language skills and many produce well-structured pieces of writing, such as, a blog about holiday destinations or when sharing their opinions about television programmes. The majority of pupils demonstrate good pronunciation in Welsh.

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

In 2019, the proportion of sixth form pupils gaining 3 A*-C and 3 A*-A grades at A level or the equivalent improved. Over the past three years, performance in these indicators has broadly been in line with that of similar schools. In general, pupils in the sixth form make similar progress to pupils elsewhere with similar levels of prior attainment. The proportion of pupils completing their courses is broadly in line with the national average.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Excellent

Nearly all pupils feel safe in school and enjoy their learning. They benefit significantly from the calm, purposeful and caring ethos that permeates the school community. Nearly all pupils demonstrate particularly high standards of behaviour in class and around the school. When moving between classes pupils behave in an orderly and purposeful manner. They are extremely polite, respectful and courteous to each other, their teachers and to any visitors. Pupils enjoy their education and develop strong, working relationships with their peers and teaching staff.

Nearly all pupils have a secure and detailed understanding of the range of support and guidance available to them. This has a highly beneficial impact on their wellbeing and learning. Nearly all pupils are confident the school deals promptly and proportionally with any incidents of bullying that occur.

Nearly all pupils arrive at lessons punctually and are ready to learn. They settle quickly and demonstrate particularly positive attitudes to their learning. Many listen carefully and respectfully to their teachers and engage purposefully with their learning. They take pride in their work and show resilience and enthusiasm when undertaking challenging tasks. Pupils work in pairs and small groups, sharing ideas and supporting each other extremely well.

Many pupils demonstrate a positive attitude towards their physical and mental wellbeing. They participate enthusiastically in the comprehensive range of sports and extra-curricular activities available at the school including the Activ8 physical sessions, choir and writers' club.

Pupils contribute well to the school Senedd and other committees and groups. They have organised a wide range of activities including the production of a high quality anti-bullying video and undertaken a range of charitable activities. They are enthusiastic about their leadership roles which has a positive impact on school life. Sixth form pupils develop their leadership skills well by arranging events such as the 'veterans' tea.

The level of pupil attendance has improved well over the last three years and is above that of similar schools.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

Most teachers know their pupils well and foster positive working relationships. They have strong subject knowledge and establish beneficial routines to ensure that pupils settle quickly and are ready to learn.

Many teachers have high expectations of what pupils can do and plan well-structured lessons to help them make progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills. These teachers provide pupils with clear and useful explanations and prepare engaging and interesting resources.

A few lessons are particularly effective. In these lessons, teachers are enthusiastic, have particularly high expectations and ask incisive questions to probe pupils' understanding and develop pupils' thinking. They plan and adapt tasks skilfully to meet the needs of all pupils. This encourages high levels of engagement and supports pupils make rapid progress.

In a minority of instances, teachers do not plan learning carefully enough to ensure pupils make appropriate progress in developing their skills. Often, they talk too much which limits pupils' engagement and opportunities for them to work independently or in small groups. In a few lessons, teachers do not have high enough expectations.

Many teachers provide useful verbal feedback at suitable points throughout the lesson. However, a minority of teachers' comments are not specific enough to ensure that pupils know how to improve their work. Overall, the impact of assessment and feedback to pupils is too variable within and across subjects.

The school has suitable arrangements in place to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. In numeracy, this work is enhanced through

high quality digital resources such as bespoke videos to model calculation processes and to support pupils to develop their reasoning skills. However, a minority of teachers do not plan precisely enough to help pupils progress in their use of their skills or to refine and develop these skills independently.

The school has a beneficial range of individualised support strategies for those pupils with weaker literacy and numeracy skills. A comprehensive range of suitable assessment data is used to identify, track and measure the progress of these pupils in developing their skills.

The school plans and adapts its curriculum carefully to ensure that it meets the needs of all pupils. This has a positive impact on pupils' outcomes, personal development and wellbeing. The school has effective arrangements to help pupils make a smooth transition into Year 7 with valuable activities for pupils from Year 4 onwards. The option week programme in year 9 provides pupils with beneficial opportunities to develop their understanding of the wide range of academic and vocational courses available at key stage 4. These pupils are able to choose from a wide range of academic and vocational courses. The school works well with local schools to broaden the curriculum offer available to pupils in the sixth form.

The school provides opportunities for pupils to engage in worthwhile curriculum enrichment activities. These include local and international educational visits to Hay-on-Wye for the literature festival and cities such as Paris and Bruges, as well as sporting and theatre activities. The school provides useful opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills. They develop pupils' appreciation of Welsh heritage and culture successfully through activities such as the annual eisteddfod, and residential visits to Llangrannog and Glan Llyn.

Care, support and guidance: Excellent

St John Baptist Church in Wales School provides extremely high quality care, support and guidance. It seeks to enrich pupils' lives through faith and a high quality education in a caring supportive Christian environment. This contributes very well to pupils' wellbeing, their exemplary behaviour and engagement in learning and to the strong progress that many make.

Staff know their pupils very well and foster purposeful relationships with them. The school tracks robustly pupils' academic progress, behaviour and attendance, enabling it to identify and respond promptly and effectively to any risk of underperformance. Pastoral and curriculum leaders make beneficial use of this information to implement and monitor the impact of any support provided. As a result, many pupils achieve strong outcomes at the end of key stage 4, there are very few incidents of poor behaviour and pupil attendance rates are high.

There are highly effective arrangements to identify and support those pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and those who have emotional, health or social issues. Systems for referring pupils for learning support are clear and consistent, and understood well by all staff. The pastoral team and the additional learning needs coordinator provide a wide range of interventions and support programmes that enable vulnerable pupils to progress and achieve well. The school has purposeful relationships with a wide range of external and specialist agencies and uses these

well to strengthen its support arrangements. The individual education plans created for pupils requiring support outline appropriate, specific pupil targets, and include helpful strategies for staff to support these pupils in lessons. This enables these pupils to make strong progress against their individual targets.

The school supports the development of pupils' basic and life skills well and enables them to build their confidence and resilience to persevere when faced with challenges. In particular, the school identifies skillfully those pupils who are at risk of being disaffected, and plan an individualised programme to support them and their families effectively. This contributes well to their positive attitudes to learning and high levels of engagement.

An exceptional feature is the way in which the school and the wider community work together to support the personal development of pupils. Their support for the most vulnerable and those with SEN at transition points, is a particular strength. The regular and timely visits and sensitive support enables these pupils to settle quickly in their new school and to progress in their learning successfully.

The school's working relationship with parents makes a notable contribution to the exceptional wellbeing of pupils. Through a regular programme of support meetings, mentoring and detailed communication the school keeps all parents informed well of their child's progress and wellbeing. These positive and productive relationships help the school to have a good understanding of the needs of parents, and enables staff to plan and structure individual support programmes effectively. As a result, the school is able to react swiftly to any concerns that parents may have. Parents are supported regularly by the school to identify the best ways in which they can support their children at home. This purposeful relationship with pupils and their parents enables them to feel valued members of a school community that embraces diversity and ensures pupils feel safe and secure.

The school is highly successful in developing pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural values, which are fundamental to all aspects of their school life. Whole-school assemblies, tutorial periods and visiting speakers enhance pupils' understanding of a range of backgrounds and cultures. This supports pupils successfully to become compassionate individuals who understand and embrace diversity, and support each other well. School assemblies make an important contribution to developing these attributes and give pupils an important opportunity for reflection, for example, the recent assembly for Holocaust Remembrance Day.

The school promotes healthy eating and drinking well and this contributes suitably to pupils' understanding of how lifestyle choices impact on their physical and mental health. This includes the Activ8 programme which introduces pupils to new activities and has increased the number that take part in regular physical exercise. The varied enrichment programme and extra-curricular activities provide valuable opportunities for pupils to enhance their physical and mental health. The school works successfully in partnership with the local authority youth engagement and participation team to enhance this provision with additional opportunities ranging from pottery to leadership development.

The comprehensive personal and social education programme, which is supported well by outside agencies, reinforces the school's values and supports pupils'

personal development skilfully. The structured careers programme of taster days, careers fayres, visits, open evenings and interviews provide helpful advice to pupils and parents on potential career choices, apprenticeships, further and higher education. This enables pupils to make well informed decisions about their learning pathways.

The school supports pupils to develop their leadership skills well. This includes being part of the school council and making important decisions about school life, the young leaders award for all Year 7 pupils, hosting a veterans' party and leading Eucharist assemblies.

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

Leadership and management: Good

Leadership at all levels contributes particularly well to pupils' high levels of wellbeing and the progress that many make.

The headteacher provides assured and supportive leadership. She is well-respected by all members of the school community and has been successful in fostering a strongly committed and collaborative staff body. Together with the governing body, the headteacher promotes successfully a shared ethos and values, and the clear vision to provide a high-quality education within a caring environment.

The senior leadership team sets out clear expectations for all areas of the school's work. Leaders at all levels, understand fully their roles and responsibilities to address the school's priorities. As part of this work, there is a clear focus on addressing national priorities, in particular through improving pupils' attendance and reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment.

There are well-defined line management arrangements to oversee, monitor, support and, where relevant, challenge staff to raise standards, improve provision and support pupils' wellbeing. Meetings at all levels focus primarily and appropriately on pupils' progress, identifying those who are underachieving and implementing suitable interventions to support improvement.

There is a comprehensive programme of improvement processes. These include biennial curriculum reviews and robust analyses of performance data. These activities help leaders to acquire a secure understanding of the school's strengths and relevant areas for improvement. Leaders use this information well to identify key priorities, and to implement a broad range of whole-school and departmental initiatives to support improvement. As part of the curriculum review process, leaders consult pupils usefully about their views of provision. Despite these strengths, curriculum reviews and other evaluations do not focus closely enough on pupils' skills and the quality and effectiveness of teaching and assessment. In a few cases, planned actions are not precise enough and do not relate directly to developing pupils' skills and improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Systematic performance management arrangements enable teachers to reflect beneficially on their practice and help identify relevant areas for development.

Performance management objectives relate directly to school and national priorities as well as teachers' professional interests.

A beneficial range of professional learning opportunities contributes positively to a developing culture of reflection. Teaching and support staff work well together to consider and promote good practice. The school collaborates particularly well with other schools, for example as a lead partner school for initial teacher education. There is a strong emphasis on distributing leadership responsibilities. This provides valuable opportunities for middle leaders to both shadow senior roles and to take on responsibility for whole school improvement priorities. These approaches are contributing well to strengthening the capacity of the school's leadership.

The governing body shows a strong commitment to supporting all areas of the school's work. Governors contribute appropriately to determining the school's strategic direction and identifying specific priorities. They are well informed about the school's work and provide clear support and an appropriate degree of challenge to the leadership team. Governors contribute regularly to school assemblies and other aspects of worship and, for example, supporting the work of the special educational needs department.

The governors, together with the headteacher and bursar manage the school's finances robustly. The headteacher and governing body review carefully leadership roles and responsibilities, staffing requirements and general capitation to ensure that the curriculum is delivered successfully and is cost-effective.

The school uses its resources including the pupil development grant effectively to reduce the impact of poverty on educational attainment. For example, highly-skilled support staff mentor pupils eligible for free school meals to improve their attendance and support their wellbeing. This approach contributes well to the progress these pupils make.

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:

Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

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Publication date: 30/03/2020