



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

**A report on**

**Fitzalan High School**

**Fitzalan High School  
Leckwith Road  
Cardiff  
CF11 8AP**

**Date of inspection: November 2024**

**by**

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

## About Fitzalan High School

Name of provider	Fitzalan High School
Local authority	Cardiff Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	1830
Pupils of statutory school age	1475
Number in sixth form	356
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Secondary is 21.1%)	36.6%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Secondary is 11.2%)	9.3%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.4%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	24.7%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2024
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	27/02/2017
Start date of inspection	04/11/2024

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: [mylocalschool.gov.wales](https://mylocalschool.gov.wales)

- a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

## Summary

Fitzalan High School provides its pupils with a highly caring, nurturing and inclusive environment. It is particularly effective in establishing a culture that celebrates its notably diverse community. This helps to foster positive attitudes towards diversity, equity and the understanding of different cultures and backgrounds. As a result, most pupils feel safe, valued and respected.

The school's work is characterised by high expectations, strong leadership, reflective self-evaluation, and close links with its local community. Staff work diligently and collaboratively to secure the best possible outcomes for all pupils. The school is particularly effective in tailoring its provision to meet individual needs, including those of its most vulnerable pupils. This has a notably strong impact on pupils' well-being and achievement.

In many lessons, effective teaching helps pupils to make sound progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills, and a minority make particularly strong progress. Pupils benefit from a wide range of opportunities to develop their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. In particular, the school works effectively to establish positive attitudes to reading. Although pupils use their digital skills appropriately in some areas of the curriculum, strategies to develop this aspect remain at an early stage.

Pupils benefit from an extensive range of provision to support their personal development. This includes a comprehensive personal and social education programme, extensive extra-curricular activities and a wide range of opportunities to take on leadership roles. The school is especially effective at raising the aspirations of pupils from all backgrounds to help them fulfil their potential.

The school is successful in addressing national priorities, for example by reducing the impact of poverty on attainment and promoting the development of pupils' Welsh language skills. Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding, where staff are clear about their role in keeping pupils safe.

## Recommendations

We have made one recommendation to help the school continue to improve:

- R1 Strengthen provision for the development of pupils' digital skills across the curriculum

## 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 senior leaders securing accountability and professional learning to develop middle leadership and provision to develop pupils' understanding of histories, stories and contributions of black, Asian and minority ethnic people, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

## Main findings

### Teaching and learning

Careful planning of provision and the many instances of effective teaching have a positive impact on the achievement and progress of pupils at Fitzalan High School. In lessons, many pupils make good progress in the development of their knowledge, understanding and skills, and a minority make particularly strong progress. In a few instances, where teachers do not provide sufficient challenge, pupils make only limited progress. Pupils with ALN make good progress against their personal targets.

Purposeful and productive relationships between pupils and staff are a prominent feature of the school. In nearly all lessons, teachers establish well-understood routines that ensure pupils settle quickly to tasks. In general, teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and create a calm, purposeful learning environment. As a result, most pupils sustain their concentration well. Many listen carefully to their teachers and peers and work effectively in pairs and groups to support each other's learning.

Many teachers carefully plan sequences of activities that build well on each other. They prepare a variety of engaging and challenging resources and help pupils to develop their resilience, persevere when faced with difficult tasks and work well independently. These teachers provide clear explanations and deploy support staff effectively to support pupils' learning, including those with additional learning needs.

In nearly all lessons, teachers ask suitable questions to check pupils' understanding. A majority use questioning skilfully to challenge pupils' thinking and deepen their learning. In many cases, teachers monitor pupils' progress closely and provide them with timely and helpful verbal feedback. Where necessary, they swiftly address any misconceptions. They plan useful activities to enable pupils to improve their work and deepen their understanding. However, the use of written feedback to improve the technical accuracy of pupils' writing is too variable.

In a few instances, teachers do not provide enough challenge and do not use questioning well enough to develop pupils' thinking. As a result, a few pupils remain passive in lessons and are reluctant to engage in class discussions.

Sixth form pupils are polite and welcoming to visitors, have positive attitudes and contribute positively to lessons. Most persevere well when faced with particularly challenging tasks. Many give articulate verbal responses to teachers' questions, and in some cases ask perceptive questions in order to deepen their understanding.

There are numerous worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. The provision to support the progressive development of these skills is well planned and coordinated and is supported appropriately in relevant subjects. The school has recognised the importance of improving pupils' reading skills and made it a whole-school priority. Opportunities for pupils to develop their digital skills are in place but the coordination of them remains at an early stage.

### **Spotlight: Creating a reading culture**

All pupils benefit from the whole-school prioritisation of reading and the development of a strong reading culture. This is underpinned robustly by suitable book recommendations, role models among teaching staff and regular reading time in form periods and within a dedicated library space. By covering many subject areas, including social issues outside of school, pupils learn to appreciate that reading has a place in many aspects of life, and helps them develop as well-rounded individuals, receptive to new ideas.

Many pupils use their reading skills suitably to identify relevant information from a range of sources including videos, newspapers and satellite images. This helps them, for example, to consider reliability or bias. A minority use advanced reading skills well to summarise and synthesise information. A minority of pupils are not confident in using these reading skills.

Many pupils listen well and respond suitably to the contributions of others. Ongoing developments in the pre-teaching of vocabulary support pupils to use a wide range of subject-specific terms in their verbal contributions. This builds their proficiency to use this vocabulary in written responses. In a few lessons, pupils' underdeveloped responses are the result of them not always maintaining focused listening, or shortcomings in teachers' questioning.

Pupils benefit from a range of opportunities to write at length and for different purposes and audiences. Many do so appropriately and structure their work suitably. A minority write with confidence and sophistication and engage the reader successfully. A minority make basic errors in their writing, and a few produce only brief, underdeveloped pieces, using a limited vocabulary.

Many pupils develop their numeracy skills well. They use the four rules fluently and convert confidently between fractions, decimals and percentages. A minority of pupils have strong numeracy skills, for example they factorise to simplify algebraic equations assuredly. Many pupils have secure understanding of algebra as well as shape and measure. They apply formulae successfully to calculate a range of compound measures, including speed and density, and convert between different metric units. However, opportunities for younger pupils to apply their numeracy skills to multi-step problems in real-life context are more limited.

Across the curriculum, the majority of pupils use data handling skills appropriately. They construct graphs accurately and, when given the opportunity, analyse them appropriately, such as when they identify the volume of river discharge on a hydrograph for a flooding event. However, a minority of pupils make mistakes when constructing graphs, for example by using incorrect scales.

The school has high expectations for the development of pupils' Welsh language skills and supports pupils effectively to develop these skills. Most pupils translate basic words accurately and hold short conversations in Welsh in pairs or groups. A few pupils are reluctant to contribute during discussions. Many pupils write short, accurate pieces in Welsh and use mutations accurately. A minority write at length in Welsh confidently. A minority of pupils make some basic errors in their writing.

Staff in the specialist resource base provide their pupils with a range of engaging learning experiences. Most make suitable progress against their starting points, with a few making strong progress. Many demonstrate a positive attitude to learning and are keen to contribute during class discussions. They listen well and are respectful of each other.

The way in which the school adapts its curriculum to meet the individual needs of its pupils is a significant strength. Leaders review and evaluate all aspects of the curriculum thoroughly, using a wide range of evidence and make thoughtful and timely amendments to their provision. This has a notably positive impact on pupils' engagement, well-being and achievement.

Leaders have a clear vision for their Curriculum for Wales and plan successfully to help pupils achieve the four purposes. Staff work closely with local primary schools so that the curriculum supports pupils' progress from previous key stages. The curriculum provides pupils with a broad and varied range of learning experiences.

At Key Stage 4 and the sixth form it offers an extensive range of general and vocational courses. This includes fashion and textiles, sociology, nutrition and health, travel and tourism, film studies, economics and further mathematics. Pupils are provided with a wide range of information to help inform their options, higher education and career choices.

### **Spotlight: Tailored provision for vulnerable pupils**

The school supports the progress and well-being of vulnerable pupils with an extensive range of carefully planned, tailored provision that meets their individual needs particularly effectively. Provision such as 'Thrive' and the 'Fitzalan Support Hub' helps pupils to build their self-confidence, develop positive attitudes to learning and improve their attendance, whilst also supporting them to achieve academically and gain valuable qualifications. These provisions are closely matched to pupils' individual needs and are regularly reviewed and amended to maximise their impact.

The comprehensive PSE programme, delivered through health and wellbeing lessons and 'My Future' sessions, supports the personal development of pupils, including those in the sixth form, particularly effectively. It covers an extensive range

of important topics, such as addictive substances, parenthood and caring, media literacy, recognising and preventing discrimination and respectful relationships. This provision is frequently reviewed and adapted in response to a range of information, including feedback from pupils, parents and the community. This helps the school to meet the needs of pupils and help to prepare them for life outside and after school.

The school provides pupils with an extensive range of on and off-site activities to enrich and extend the curriculum, such as sessions in the school garden, a trip to the British Film Institute and a visit to a Roman archaeological dig. Pupils also benefit from an extensive range of extra-curricular activities, for example the STEM, 'DebateMate', Board Game and Public Speaking clubs, as well as 'Clwb Enfys', a pupil-led club to promote tolerance and respect with regard to the LGBTQ+ community.

More able pupils are supported effectively to meet their potential and develop high aspirations, for example through trips to and joint activities with universities. These pupils also benefit from mentoring by staff and, in Key Stage 4, by older pupils.

Across the curriculum, pupils benefit from a wide range of opportunities to learn about Welsh heritage and culture as well as the experiences of the LGBTQ+ community. The way that the school develops pupils' understanding of the histories, stories and contributions of black, Asian and minority ethnic people is a notable strength. Pupils learn about the Silk Road and the Ottoman empire in history, and study units on Islamophobia, Black Lives Matter, multi-faith Britain and the experience of refugees. In addition, visits from entrepreneurs and sporting ambassadors from the local community, some of whom are past pupils, enhance this aspect of the school's work.

### **Well-being, care, support and guidance**

Staff and pupils at Fitzalan are highly committed to their school and its community. There is a strong culture of mutual respect and understanding reflecting the school's ethos of being 'Ready to Learn, Respectful and Safe'. This is underpinned by a determination to identify and remove any barriers preventing pupils from developing as effective learners. This determination permeates the care support and guidance pupils receive.

Most pupils are polite and mature and their positive attitudes are reflected in their good behaviour in lessons and around the school site. They value the consistent use of the behaviour and rewards system, which they find motivating and fair. Most pupils feel confident in the school's approach to handling bullying and harassment, celebrating diversity, and fostering positive peer relationships. They feel safe in school and know who to speak to should they have a concern.

Pastoral leaders plan their provision carefully, analysing a range of data closely to refine intervention strategies. This ensures the targeted provision for all pupils is highly effective. The support for pupils from diverse backgrounds, including the Somali and Roma communities, is provided through dedicated teaching assistants who serve as effective liaisons between school and home. The school works closely with external agencies. For example, a local charity mentors pupils from low-income households. Close links with local primary schools help the school to support pupils'

transition to secondary school effectively. Valuable professional learning helps all staff to contribute to the school's pastoral strategies.

Senior leaders, supported by governors, staff and pupils, maintain a strong safeguarding culture. School arrangements to keep pupils safe are clear and robust. Staff deal with reported incidents of bullying and provide tailored programmes of support for individuals helping them to understand and address any inappropriate behaviours. The school supports other schools in improving their safeguarding processes.

The school supports pupils' understanding of diversity and inclusion and how to challenge negative stereotypes and attitudes highly effectively. A valuable programme for pastoral lessons and form time supports pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The ALN team provide a sympathetic and nurturing environment to develop all the pupils in their care. There is a wide range of beneficial support for learners with additional needs, for example the 'Nurture' provision for vulnerable pupils. The school is making good progress in meeting the requirements of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act. Individual Development Plans and one-page profiles help staff to understand clearly the challenges that pupils face and how best they can be supported

The specialist resource base provides a nurturing and supportive environment for its pupils. Staff know their pupils well and understand their individual needs. As a result, pupils feel safe and secure. Pupils are supported well to develop social and emotional skills. They are encouraged to integrate into wider school life, for example by participating in extra-curricular activities.

The school promotes the importance of good attendance to pupils and parents through letters and reward systems. Leaders monitor and analyse pupils' attendance carefully and collaborate closely with external agencies to improve individual pupil attendance. Although overall attendance remains below pre-pandemic levels and declined slightly in 2023-2024, for the last two years attendance, including that of pupils eligible for free school meals, has remained well above that of similar schools. In addition, rates of persistent absence have remained below the national average and well below those of similar schools.

The school provides pupils with helpful tailored advice and guidance on their next steps in learning. A carefully planned programme of guidance lessons, supported by a range of external agencies, ensures that all pupils have equal access to career and higher education advice. The school monitors pupils' engagement with this process carefully in order to maximise its impact.

Opportunities for the development of pupil leadership are a notable strength of the school. Leaders place a strong focus on inclusivity, ensuring all pupil groups are represented in these activities. Pupil views are gathered regularly, and leaders frequently meet pupils to discuss school improvement priorities and aspects of teaching and learning. As a result, they are able to influence the work of the school, for example in the design of the motif on the school gates. Sixth form pupils make a



significant contribution to school life. They provide academic mentoring in a range of subjects, and are responsible for running many of the clubs that the school offers.

### **Leading and improving**

The acting headteacher offers assured and compassionate leadership which takes good account of the well-being of the whole school community. He has a clear and well-understood vision that underpins the school's ambition of 'learning together to be the best we can be'. He works determinedly with his team to remove barriers to pupils' learning and secure an inclusive community in which all pupils have the opportunity to excel.

Senior leaders' roles and responsibilities are clear and distributed thoughtfully, taking into account the context of the school and individual strengths and experience. They have continued to drive forward improvement priorities effectively despite the significant upheaval of moving the school community to a new site and a reorganisation of leadership responsibilities. Their careful and measured approach to change management has secured an exceptional team ethos amongst staff. There are beneficial opportunities for staff to take on additional roles within departments as well as whole school responsibilities. This contributes well to the overall feeling among staff that they are valued.

The senior team provide each other with robust challenge in their uncompromising focus on removing barriers to learning and securing high-quality teaching and learning. Middle leaders understand their role in contributing to the school's success and provide effective leadership. They feel valued and supported by the senior team.

Senior leaders have created a culture of high accountability that contributes significantly to the school's effectiveness. Clear and robust line management and performance management arrangements ensure purposeful challenge and support and focus closely on pupil learning and well-being as well as progress against strategic priorities. This used well to inform a comprehensive professional learning offer for staff, including for non-teaching staff. Staff benefit from valuable opportunities for the sharing of good practice. Leaders monitor the impact of professional learning closely.

Leaders have recently revised their approach to self-evaluation, and this has strengthened their focus on how well pupils are developing their knowledge, skills and understanding during lessons. In general, senior and middle leaders work together effectively to identify specific areas for improvement, although there is some variation in how precisely middle leaders evaluate the impact teaching has on pupil progress.

Underperformance is managed robustly and sensitively. Where appropriate, leaders put in place comprehensive arrangements to support individual staff or departments to improve. This includes support from peers and opportunities to experience effective practice in similar settings. This has been exceptionally successful in improving teaching and leadership, and is a notable strength of the school's work.

Leaders take a considered and comprehensive approach to addressing national priorities, such as implementing Curriculum for Wales, the ALNET Act, alleviating the

impact of poverty, and promoting the Welsh language. They work well with local primary schools and share good practice with other secondary schools. They have established a strong culture of safeguarding across the school.

Governors are highly committed supporters of the school and have a sound understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They provide robust, helpful challenge where appropriate. They proactively support the work of the school within the community. Governors take their responsibility for promoting healthy eating and drinking seriously. They have played an active part in improving the canteen by increasing portion sizes and the quality of the food on offer to ensure that all pupils have access to a nutritious and affordable meal during the school day.

The acting headteacher, business manager and governing body manage the school budget meticulously. The pupil development grant and a hardship fund are used effectively to remove barriers to learning. For example, extra transport is provided to ensure that pupils can access revision sessions and extra-curricular activities after school.

Overall, leadership has had a significantly positive impact on many important aspects of the school's work and has played a notable role in securing strong outcomes for pupils.

### **Additional information**

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

The school has appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking.

Leaders and governors manage the school's finances appropriately, including the use of the pupil development grant.

## 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 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, where appropriate
- visit a broad sample of lessons, 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' well-being, 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

## Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. '*most pupils...*' or '*very few pupils...*'. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/>)

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 publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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