



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

A report on

Christ College

**Brecon
Powys
LD3 8AF**

Date of inspection: November 2024

by

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

About Christ College

Name of provider	Christ College
Proprietor status	Private Limited Company
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent all age
Residential provision?	Yes
Number of pupils on roll	378
Pupils of statutory school age	255
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	22/10/2017
Start date of inspection	11/11/2024
<p>School context:</p> <p>Christ College is an independent co-educational boarding and day all-age school situated in the centre of Brecon in Powys and was founded by Henry VIII in 1541.</p> <p>Just under a fifth of pupils are from different countries around the world and a very few pupils are from HM Forces families. About half the pupils board, either full-boarding, weekly boarding or flexi-boarding (three nights per week). The school is organised around a house structure along with day hubs, one for the sixth form day pupils and one for the day pupils in Years 9 to 11.</p> <p>A very few pupils are identified by the school as requiring additional support. These pupils' learning needs are met through effective teaching, pull-out interventions and adaptations to resources and/or the use of assistive technologies. A very few pupils receive support in learning English as an additional language. Very few pupils are from Welsh-speaking homes or speak Welsh as a first language. Lessons are in English, and the school does not aim to make pupils bilingual in English and Welsh.</p> <p>Throughout the report references to different sections of the school are as follows. The prep school is divided into upper and lower sections known as Alway House (Years 7-8) and St. Nicholas House, or St. Nick's (Years 1-6). The senior school is Years 9-13.</p>	

Summary

The headteacher drives a strong moral ethos that unites all members of the school community. Leaders at all levels across the school, work very effectively with one another. They have a determined focus on promoting well-being and academic achievement. As a result, there is a well-understood collective purpose amongst staff to act in the best interests of every pupil.

Pupils demonstrate exemplary manners and celebrate each other's achievements with sincerity and enthusiasm. They welcome the inclusivity of the school and display a high level of trust in their teachers. Pupils and staff have a shared ambition for learning that is a hallmark of lessons across the school. Pupils value the distinct academic and pastoral support they receive. As a result, older pupils leave the school as well rounded individuals, with strong public examination results and a clear understanding of how to identify and follow their future pathway.

Across the school, pupils are confident and communicate clearly when speaking and writing for a variety of purposes. The strong foundational literacy and numeracy skills laid in St. Nicholas House continue to develop as pupils move through the school. Senior school pupils develop strong subject-specific skills and continue to display high levels of engagement, and sixth form pupils in particular connect their learning in different subjects effectively.

Leaders' planning for strategic and operational improvement is a strength of the school. The governing body is highly effective in the oversight it has of the work of the school. This helps to ensure that improvement priorities are evidence based. However, this work is not yet driving improvements in the consistency of teaching.

Across the school, the most effective learning experiences are those that respond to pupils' questions and work. In these lessons, teachers use their exceptional subject knowledge, provide interesting and adapted learning experiences, and through, for example, careful probing questioning and timely effective verbal feedback, deepen pupils' understanding. However, across the school, a few learning activities are overly directed, which limits pupils' opportunities to direct, own and improve their learning.

The school complies fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024.

Main evaluation

Christ College Brecon; a highly caring and cohesive community

The headteacher promotes strong moral and professional values. These contribute very effectively to an ethos that unites all members of the school community. There is a clear and determined focus on promoting pupils' well-being and personal development, in parallel with academic achievement. Leaders have successfully

sustained a caring family community towards which pupils, parents and past pupils display great loyalty and affection.

The headteacher knows their school and every individual extremely well. He understands the school's current context and pressures, whilst respecting its long history and planning future ambitions. Leaders have built and maintained outstanding relationships with parents, who see Christ College as an extended family as much as they do a school.

Leaders at all levels have established a collective purpose, centred on acting in the best interests of every pupil. As a result, staff have high expectations of pupils' well-being, behaviour and achievement and understand how they contribute to developing these. Most staff embrace challenge and improvement, in a spirit of collegiality and transparency, knowing that it serves the purpose of their common aims.

Nearly all staff at the school are dedicated and help pupils to settle quickly when they join the school. All pupils are encouraged to embrace every aspect of school life. Nearly all pupils are ambitious to do well and are supported effectively through academic tutoring and welfare systems.

Pupils celebrate each other's achievements, across all areas of school life, with sincerity and enthusiasm. Pupils take pride in their school. They are highly respectful of each other regardless of their background or beliefs. They welcome the inclusivity of the school and value the strong school community and the support this brings.

Pupils feel safe in school and know whom to talk to if they are worried. For example, 'worry monsters' are used in St. Nicholas House classrooms and QR codes are available to discretely share a concern. Pupils have confidence in this process and are comfortable to do this.

Spotlight: House System

At Christ College a 'house' system is woven into and intrinsic to boarding and day pupils' daily school lives. One highly visible impact of the house system is the engagement it drives in an extraordinary range of academic, artistic, dramatical, musical, and sporting competitions. These competitions, spread across the academic year, help bind pupils together and each week in assembly there is a palpable excitement ahead of the updated scores being announced. Beneath these competitions, the 'house system' plays a vital role in the well-being support of pupils at the school. It is another valuable layer of care, which provides pupils the opportunity to develop trusting, respectful and positive relationships with house staff and house mates of all ages, in both boarding and day settings across the school.

Character, co-operation and behaviour

Within lessons and around the wider school environment, pupils demonstrate exemplary behaviour and manners.

Across the school, pupils in democratically elected leadership positions meet regularly with the senior leaders ensuring that their voice is heard and their

suggestions implemented when appropriate. Many pupils take up leadership opportunities and become prefects, wearing their distinctive badges or jackets with pride. In 'St Nick's', in-class responsibilities happen organically and are intrinsic to lessons, with pupils demonstrating initiative and responsibility, for example as a Digital Monitor to operate the timer for tasks.

There are many valuable leadership opportunities for sixth form pupils, including helping to coach younger pupils during sporting activities and assisting staff with leading various clubs and societies. Senior pupils support the learning of younger pupils, for example conducting restorative conversations and coaching them to develop sporting skills. The prefects lead committees, organise charity events to support local and national causes, and contribute to life in the wider community by representing the school at remembrance and volunteering at a local care home in Brecon.

Building confident capable pupils

Across the school, nearly all teachers build strong, effective working relationships with their pupils. Pupils display a high level of trust in teachers, and shared ambition is a hallmark of learning across the school. The respectful trusting relationships pupils have with all staff support their well-being and engagement in learning. As a result, there is a clear culture of caring and pupils are eager to learn.

The school has a broad and balanced curriculum appropriate to all age ranges, complemented by a comprehensive 'Second Curriculum'.

The 'Second Curriculum' is the school's extensive co-curricular programme. Led by music, drama, sports and outdoor education departments, it aims to '*suit every talent, enthusiasm and gift*'. Nearly all pupils in the prep school participate in a range of clubs such as crafts, cookery, Forest School and kinetic sand, which broadens their wider skills and interests highly effectively. Ideas for new clubs, such as glass painting, are suggested by the pupils and vary throughout the year. In the senior school, the range of clubs includes horse riding, public speaking, touch typing, science or sports podcasting. Many pupils attend three or more activities throughout the week. The 'Second Curriculum' is extended into Saturday mornings for all pupils with different activities such as golf, a wide-ranging 'Adventure Programme' including mountain biking, paddle sports and rehearsals for the upcoming school production: 'Shrek: The Musical'. Pupils enjoy the balance between physical and creative activities and often select a variety. Parents appreciate the value that the school places on the development of the 'whole child' and the encouragement by staff to pursue a range of holistic skills.

Pupils talk positively about the distinct academic and welfare support they receive from the school. As a result of this support, pupils demonstrate resilience and are prepared well for life beyond school.

Spotlight: The 'Futures Programme'

The 'Futures Programme', encompassing guidance related to careers and future pathways, is well established and an integral part of the school's provision throughout senior school. All teaching staff are involved in its delivery and development, and the programme is founded on the school's ethos of personalised care for pupils. As a result, pupils have a well-developed understanding of the world of work and the breadth of opportunities and pathways available to them beyond school. The highly effective work done by the school in support of university applications results in a high proportion of Year 13 leavers progressing to their preferred destination, for example university study, apprenticeships or employment.

Lower Prep School, St. Nicholas House

During their time in the lower prep school, most pupils make good and at times very good progress in their literacy and numeracy skills from their individual starting points. As they move through the school, pupils begin to extend their understanding and gain knowledge skilfully in an interesting range of learning contexts.

When pupils enter 'St Nick's', they quickly begin to make good progress in developing their communication skills. For instance, they develop their knowledge of phonics and soon start to recognise the structure of sentences. Over time these skills are further developed, and most older pupils can successfully interpret unfamiliar words and read with suitable fluency and accuracy. There is a strong culture of reading embedded across the school, which impacts positively on the progress that most pupils make.

In the younger classes, most pupils listen to others with increasing attention and follow instructions well. They are keen to learn, engage confidently with visitors and are enthusiastic about talking and explaining what they are doing. By the time they reach Year 6, most are confident and articulate communicators. They speak assuredly, using a wide-ranging vocabulary, for example when recalling a class debate about the effects of screen time on young people's well-being. Opportunities for further public speaking and oracy are provided regularly at prep school chapel services and assemblies.

From a young age, most pupils make strong progress in their writing skills. As they move through the school, most write purposeful extended sentences with an increasingly accurate range of punctuation, vocabulary and form. For example, by the end of Year 4, most pupils can write accurately at length using paragraphs, and appropriate punctuation. By the end of Year 6, most pupils use formal and technical vocabulary skilfully and adapt a variety of structures in their writing very well across the curriculum.

Most pupils across 'St Nick's' develop as confident and skilful mathematicians. As they progress through the school, most pupils build their competence in using a variety of techniques to successfully solve problems. They apply these skills well across the curriculum. For example, younger pupils, use their counting and measuring skills well when undertaking a science experiment about the benefits of

regular exercise. Older pupils solve increasingly complex number problems successfully.

Upper Prep, Alway House

Nearly all pupils make appropriate or better progress from their individual starting points. A minority of pupils make strong progress in lessons and over time. Most pupils maintain concentration and show genuine interest in their work. They show perseverance when tasks are challenging and exercise a high degree of self-control. This is a notable strength.

Most pupils listen attentively to teachers, are supportive of their peers and are eager to participate in class discussions. For example, when discussing a novel in English, they show maturity and understanding when explaining how unacceptable behaviour can have a detrimental effect on victims' feelings. However, due to limited opportunities to do so, a few pupils do not always convey their ideas fully.

The majority of upper prep pupils are developing their advanced reading skills effectively. For example, pupils preparing a debate on whether Queen Mary I deserved the label 'bloody Mary' synthesise information from a range of sources purposefully.

Most pupils apply their numeracy skills effectively across the curriculum, including calculating the weight of water in geography when discussing erosion. However, pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to develop their digital skills in subjects other than computer science and IT. Most pupils develop their creative skills effectively during art lessons such as when experimenting with a range of paint colours in the style of Henri Matisse.

Senior School

Nearly all pupils demonstrate strong levels of engagement and continue to build their knowledge and skills highly effectively.

Most pupils demonstrate strong comprehension, analytical and subject-specific skills. For example, in music, pupils explain the application of compositional techniques within Bach's "Brandenburg Concertos" extremely well and describe polyphony and other musical concepts fluently. Pupils excel in summarising complex biological terms like 'gametes' and 'crossing-over practice' in biology and pupils studying mathematics manipulate complex polynomial equations confidently. In physics, pupils use their measuring skills and apply formulae accurately to solve problems, such as calculating gravitational forces.

Pupils seize the increased opportunities to engage in discussions and debates and to collaborate. As a result, they more consistently use their strong oracy, listening and reasoning skills. For example, pupils fluently hold and develop conversations in French and Welsh, or in subjects such as chemistry, geography and performing arts, they skilfully lead activities, discussions and successfully peer-review each other's work. Throughout the senior school, the level of respect for other perspectives and the courtesy afforded to those who are speaking is exemplary. They communicate their thinking clearly and with sincerity.

Most pupils demonstrate creativity in a wide range of subjects, particularly art where they produce high-quality independent work and computer science where they use decomposition and pattern recognition to solve problems and create algorithms, such as 'how to make a cheese sandwich'.

Sixth form pupils, in particular, connect their learning in different subjects effectively. For example, in business studies and economics, they apply analytical skills to build sound economic arguments to hypothesise the effects of price on the demand for equivalent products in the marketplace. However, in a minority of cases, pupils across the senior school are not consistently expected and challenged to apply their skills from other subjects, for example pupils' writing skills when responding to questions or forming short arguments in response to examination questions. Furthermore, across the senior school, limited authentic and interactive learning opportunities constrain pupils' opportunities to make stronger connections between theoretical and practical knowledge and to take ownership of their own learning.

Teaching, leading and improving

Most teachers in 'St Nick's' engage pupils effectively in their work and provide interesting learning experiences. Lessons move at a brisk pace and most teachers provide clear explanations of tasks and opportunities for pupils to reflect on their learning through short plenaries. In the best cases, teachers effectively question pupils to recall prior learning and deepen their learning. They use a range of feedback effectively to ensure that most pupils know what they need to do to improve. These approaches enable pupils to make good progress within lessons. However, in a few lessons, teachers' over-direction of pupils' learning limits opportunities for pupils to take ownership of their learning or work collaboratively on open ended tasks.

Many teachers in the upper prep and senior school have exceptional subject knowledge that extends beyond the scope of school courses. Where teaching is strongest in these parts of the school, teachers use this knowledge to react to pupils' curiosity and questions, adapting their lessons to keep levels of challenge and engagement high. In the sixth form in particular, many teachers use their expertise to act as highly effective advocates for their subjects and related fields. As a result, pupils are highly aware of, and enthusiastic about, higher education opportunities. Nearly all teachers have a highly effective understanding of the demands of public examination courses, which underpins the school's strong public examination results in Years 11, 12 and 13.

In the best lessons, planning and resources embrace flexibility, allowing teachers to react to, and accelerate, the progress being made by individual pupils. Where this happens, pupils encounter tailored levels of challenge and set their own pace of learning. However, in a minority of cases, learning is constrained by overly prescriptive activity and, as a result, pupils do not always make the progress they are capable of.

Nearly all teachers provide effective verbal feedback to pupils. In a few lessons, where practice is strongest, teachers give clear, actionable feedback to pupils who then improve specific aspects of their learning. For example, in English examination classes, pupils' extended writing is annotated with suggestions for development.

Pupils re-draft their pieces, acting on the feedback, and teachers validate improvements.

Across the school pupils' academic performance is monitored through a highly effective tracking system. As a result, staff have a detailed, up-to-date picture of individual pupils' performance, can identify any issues and deploy a wide range of effective intervention and catch-up strategies if needed. Pupils enthusiastically engage in monitoring their own attainment and are highly motivated to succeed. Nearly all pupils, parents and staff trust that the school knows individual pupils well and will act swiftly to support them and address any barriers to learning.

Planning for strategic and operational improvement is a strength of the school. With highly effective oversight and challenge from governors, leaders at all levels contribute to the establishment of clear development priorities, based on effective self-assessment of practice. Short and medium-term improvement plans contain a suitable range of targets, underpinned by achievable, carefully monitored actions. This whole-school practice is mirrored at faculty and across both the prep and senior sections of the school. Middle leaders benefit from a highly effective balance of autonomy and accountability and use this to plan effectively for improvement.

Leaders use first-hand evidence from learning walks to build an accurate picture of where teaching is strong throughout the school. However, this evidence-based work is in its early stages and is yet to be effective in driving improvement and consistency in teaching where needed.

Leaders ensure that a suitably wide range of training opportunities are available to all staff. They have begun to create more opportunities for teachers to develop teaching and learning, encouraging them to share good practices by visiting one another's lessons. Teachers and middle leaders also have opportunities to share good practice by giving presentations to colleagues. The school is developing its approach to linking findings from self-evaluation activities directly to individual members of staff's developmental needs. The evaluation of the impact of professional learning on developing teaching and learning is in its infancy.

Leaders place a strong emphasis on staff well-being and provide opportunities for regular reflection and support. As a result, staff feel valued and supported in their roles. In addition, staff have a well-developed understanding of individual pupils' learning and emotional needs and use a range of information and data well to monitor well-being and academic performance in tandem.

The governing body makes effective use of a wide range of formal and informal quality assurance and information-gathering processes. As a result, governors have a detailed picture of the strategic and operational life of the school, which enables them to act as highly effective critical friends.

The school complies fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024.

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 2024. 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.

Recommendations

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

- R1 Continue to embed and refine quality assurance activities to ensure that leaders and staff have a clear understanding of the impact of teaching upon pupils' progress
- R2 Establish and embed the school's new '5 aspirations' for learning into activities to provide pupils with more authentic opportunities to direct, own and improve their learning

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.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from parent/carer 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/carers 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' 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 163 of the Education Act 2002. The main purpose of inspection under this section is to report on compliance with the Independent Schools Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024. In schools that provide non-maintained nursery education, this report also satisfies the requirements of Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework

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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