

A report on

Bishop Vaughan R.C. School

**Mynydd Garnllwyd Road
Morrison
SA6 7QG**

Date of inspection: January 2025

by

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

About Bishop Vaughan R.C. School

Name of provider	Bishop Vaughan R.C. School
Local authority	City and County of Swansea
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	Catholic
Number of pupils on roll	1190
Pupils of statutory school age	972
Number in sixth form	212
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%)	24.0%
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%)	12.4%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.8%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	34.9%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/03/2019
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/01/2018
Start date of inspection	27/01/2025

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

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

Summary

Strong Catholic values underpin all aspects of the school's work. The culture of Bishop Vaughan Catholic School includes celebrating diversity, ensuring equity and striving for excellence. This fosters a strong sense of belonging where all members of the school community feel safe, valued and supported.

Leaders have high expectations, know the school well and build strong links with the wider community. The school's provision meets the needs of all pupils, including those of its most vulnerable pupils, well. This contributes significantly to pupils' well-being and their enjoyment in learning.

Effective teaching in many lessons helps pupils make at least sound progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills. A minority make strong progress. In a very few subject areas, pupils do not make enough progress. The school's creation of a strong reading culture, which celebrates the pleasure of reading, benefits the well-being and academic progress of many pupils. Pupils benefit from a suitable range of opportunities to develop their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum though planning for progression in their digital skills remains at an early stage.

The well-being and personal development of all pupils is a high priority within the school. 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 such as reducing the impact of poverty on attainment. However, opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills are limited and the improvement to the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals, is lower than expected. Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding, where staff are clear about their role in keeping pupils safe.

Recommendations

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

- R1. Improve the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals
- R2. Improve teaching in the very few subject areas where important shortcomings were identified
- R3. Increase the range of opportunities that pupils have to practise their Welsh

What happens next

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

Main findings

Teaching and learning

Bishop Vaughan Catholic School strives for quality, excellence and achievement in all it does. Thoughtful planning of provision and effective teaching have a positive impact on the achievement and progress of pupils. During lessons, many pupils make at least secure progress in the development of their knowledge, understanding and skills, and a minority make strong progress. In a few instances, where teachers do not always provide an appropriate level of challenge, pupils make only limited progress. Pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) make good progress against their personal targets.

Teaching and assessment

In nearly all lessons, teaching is underpinned by strong subject knowledge. In these lessons, teachers foster purposeful and productive relationships with pupils, and establish clear routines. As a result, most pupils behave very well in lessons. They settle to work quickly and follow instructions readily, which helps to create a positive learning environment.

In many lessons, teachers have high expectations of their pupils and deliver engaging, well-structured lessons that build effectively on prior learning. They use helpful resources to engage pupils and provide clear instructions and explanations. A particularly effective feature of these lessons is the pre-teaching of key vocabulary to support pupils' literacy skills. Many teachers use questioning effectively to facilitate pupils' recall of basic information and to check their understanding. However, questioning to deepen pupils' learning is less well developed. In the most effective lessons where pupils make strong progress, teachers skilfully adjust the pace to respond to pupils' progress. They use questioning highly effectively to develop pupils' verbal responses and extend their knowledge and understanding. In these lessons, teachers have very high expectations of pupils, challenge them accordingly and ensure a brisk pace to learning.

In a very few cases where progress is limited, teachers do not challenge pupils well enough. They overly scaffold activities or provide low level tasks, and the pace of teaching is not always suitable. In addition, teachers do not always adapt their lessons well enough to support pupils who need additional help.

Where feedback is most effective, it identifies clearly the most important aspects of pupils' work that need improving. However, in general, teachers' written feedback is too vague and lacks actionable steps. This limits pupils' ability to improve their work.

Curriculum

The school has made strong progress in developing its approach to Curriculum for Wales based on Catholic values and virtues, which permeate all aspects of school life. The curriculum is planned suitably to allow progress over time and to build on pupils' prior knowledge and development of skills. Leaders use a range of information to plan the curriculum so that it meets the needs of all pupils well.

The school offers a broad choice of options at Key Stage 4, including Latin and classics. Similarly in the sixth form, pupils benefit from a wide range of qualifications. These are supported by partnerships with local schools and a network of Catholic schools who provide on-line post-16 qualifications. Additionally, curriculum pathways have been designed effectively to meet the needs of pupils with ALN.

The school curriculum focuses strongly on promoting diversity, which is supported by a well-planned personal and social education (PSE) and relationship and sex education (RSE) programmes. For example, a diversity programme has been developed suitably to promote the understanding of global Black and Minority Ethnic history with cultural relevance in Wales. A sense of 'cynefin' is developed further through visits to places of cultural interest such as the Senedd and St Fagans. The school provides strong support for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through formal lessons, liturgical celebrations and the kindness members of the school community regularly display to each other.

The school enriches the curriculum to promote a range of cross-cutting themes such as local identity, health and well-being, and culture through four festivals each year.

A broad programme of extra-curricular activities enables pupils to develop their interests beyond the classroom through a wide variety of clubs in areas such as sports, performing arts and crafts. All pupils are able to access an enhanced academic programme beyond the timetabled curriculum. For example, there are masterclasses on topics such as ancient classics and zoology that are delivered by alumni, local universities and guest speakers.

Attitudes to learning

Most pupils demonstrate a strong commitment to community and respect for others. They have positive attitudes to learning and take pride in their work arriving promptly to lessons and settling quickly to their tasks. Many are enthusiastic and curious learners. They co-operate with each other maturely in pairs and small groups, and show respect for the contribution of others. A very few pupils remain passive in their lessons. Most sixth form pupils engage well with their learning, listen attentively and respond effectively to the teacher and each other. They ask questions and display humility about themselves seeking support for their independent learning as required.

Skills

There are worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. The provision to support the progressive development of these skills, literacy in particular, is planned and co-ordinated suitably and is supported appropriately in relevant subjects. The school's work on developing a reading culture, and also its focus upon oracy, are having a clear, positive impact upon pupils' speaking and writing skills, as well as their reading strategies. There are opportunities for pupils to develop their digital skills, although the co-ordination of them remains at an early stage.

Many pupils listen well and respond suitably to the contributions of others. The developments in the pre-teaching of vocabulary support pupils' use of a wide range of subject-specific terms in their verbal contributions. This builds their proficiency to use this vocabulary in written responses. Many pupils are happy to share their thoughts and ideas, including within small groups and when discussing contentious topics such as euthanasia and capital punishment. In a few lessons, pupils' underdeveloped responses are the result of them not always maintaining focused listening, or shortcomings in teachers' questioning.

It is evident that pupils read for enjoyment, and many are increasingly using a wider range of reading strategies to support their learning. This includes the use of inference to recognise the foibles of characters in novels and summary for succinct overviews of both literary and non-literary texts. In history, for example, pupils analyse and interpret historical sources well to demonstrate their knowledge of historical periods and when reflecting on the questions such as 'Was Henry VII the true 'Mab Darogan'?

Spotlight 1: The importance of reading culture

The school recognises clearly the importance of reading to boost pupils' attainment, support improvements to their well-being and to help them develop as well-rounded, ethical and informed individuals. Consequently, the development of a reading culture that celebrates the joys of reading has been prioritised by the school and underpinned by well-resourced provision including writers in residence, book groups, reading recommendations and the annual Festival Culture. This initiative benefits and is appreciated by many members of the school community.

Most pupils benefit from meaningful opportunities to write at length for different purposes and audiences, although occasionally the success criteria for these tasks do not reference the conventions of different writing types. Many write appropriately, use an increasingly broad vocabulary and structure their work suitably. A minority are over-reliant upon writing frameworks and make too many basic language errors. However, there are also examples of effective support for writing including, for example, to help pupils describe

the sequence of the formation of the planets in science. A minority of pupils write with confidence, sophistication and occasionally with flair that engages the reader successfully.

The school has recently reviewed and strengthened its approach to developing authentic opportunities for cross-curricular numeracy development. As a result of focused coaching and support, teachers in geography and science for example have adapted specific areas of the curriculum and there are now meaningful and suitably challenging examples of tasks in these subjects. Pupils exhibit secure numeracy skills in these areas of the curriculum. They demonstrate an understanding of mathematical concepts and can apply these to their learning. For example, in geography they interpret and analyse securely a range of climate data from different countries presented in a variety of graphical forms. A minority of pupils go on to use this information well to inform their written work, such as when describing world climate zones.

Pupils demonstrate secure basic number skills and generally make good progress in developing their mathematical skills. They perform calculations confidently using the four operations competently. Many pupils have a good understanding of shape and measure. They can, for instance, convert between different units for distance and time in science when considering cataract surgery, and how to use ultrasound to measure the thickness of a lens.

Pupils have a secure understanding of data handling skills and are able to represent data using a suitable range of graphs. In a few instances pupils use these to draw conclusions, such as when exploring the reasons for counter-urbanisation and population decline in London.

Many pupils use their creative skills well to contribute to lessons and to the wider life of the school. During the Festival of Peace, pupils have, for example, considered the constituent elements of a peaceful world to create a “Periodic Table of Peace”. Additionally, in mathematics, pupils have constructed tangrams of candles and doves to represent light in a troubled world.

Cymraeg

Pupils at Bishop Vaughan Catholic School value and appreciate the Welsh heritage and language within the school’s culturally diverse environment.

The majority of pupils pronounce Welsh vocabulary appropriately and translate basic words accurately. More able pupils engage in short conversations in Welsh and converse independently when given the opportunity. Many pupils use appropriate retrieval strategies to locate key facts in Welsh texts and answer basic questions. However, overall, pupils lack confidence in speaking Welsh due to limited opportunities to practise the language in lessons and throughout the school. They rely heavily on sentence builders and

vocabulary lists, limiting their ability to speak and write independently. Throughout the school, pupils are not exposed to a sufficient variety of reading materials to develop their language skills further.

In addition to the annual Eisteddfod and the celebration of Welsh saints, the school has begun to implement opportunities for pupils to experience Welsh history and culture. However, these developments remain at an early stage.

Well-being, care, support and guidance

The school's caring and highly inclusive ethos reflects the vision that every pupil should flourish. There is a strong sense of community and staff build positive relationships with pupils, modelling the behaviours that they wish to inspire. As a result, the courtesy, politeness and respectfulness of pupils to each other, staff and visitors is a notable strength of the school, reflecting strong Catholic values and attributes.

Pupils say their teachers are supportive, approachable and caring. They value a reward system which motivates them to work hard and a sanction system that is fair. Pupils also report that the very few incidents of poor behaviour are dealt with swiftly so that they do not impact on the learning of others.

The pastoral team work highly effectively and collaboratively to support pupils in moderating their behaviours and meet the values of the school. This includes working closely with parents and a range of community partners to find solutions. When appropriate, the pastoral team provides well-considered, personalised support that enables pupils to re-engage successfully with their learning. This includes a range of useful and helpful internal provisions such as Nurture, Engage, Accelerate and Aspire.

The school places a strong emphasis on the well-being, care, support and guidance for its pupils. They work with an extensive range of external agencies, other schools and parents to meet pupils' needs. Pupils state that there is valuable support available to them should they need it. They say that the very rare incidents of bullying are dealt with promptly. The school develops pupils' social and emotional skills through RE and RSE lessons, assemblies, acts of collective worship linked to the virtues of the Catholic pupil profile and through weekly PSE lessons.

The school has a strong culture of safeguarding underpinned by an ethos of mutual support reflecting gospel values. Leaders, staff, and pupils work diligently to maintain this focus, ensuring that safeguarding remains a priority for all. Staff demonstrate a clear understanding of their responsibilities, completing relevant training, with a number of staff undertaking additional training to enhance their knowledge and effectiveness.

Weekly safeguarding team meetings ensure that concerns are recorded and addressed carefully. In addition, the school follows safer recruitment procedures. Governors receive regular and informative safeguarding updates with a designated safeguarding governor and a well-being governor providing additional oversight. Strong partnerships with external agencies help the school stay informed about local concerns. Effective monitoring processes are in place to track and address any incidents of bullying and racial discrimination should they occur, with a focus on resolution and support. As a result, close monitoring of trends allows the school to adapt its provision to meet pupils' needs effectively.

Pupils at Bishop Vaughan Catholic School are given clear guidance with respect to the next steps in their learning. This includes an early transition programme with cluster primary schools featuring music events, a year group trip and link projects in subjects such as humanities and art. Careers guidance is well established throughout the school with individual support and potential career pathway advice.

The Entitlement Charter of the school ensures that all pupils are offered experiences in the arts, including free music lessons. An extensive range of extra-curricular activities is available to all pupils during break times and after school, including Minecraft club and table tennis. The school has introduced four celebratory festivals throughout the year, which are well established. The Festival of Peace successfully celebrates and educates pupils and the wider community about the range of cultures at Bishop Vaughan. This event is also a vehicle to support pupils' leadership skills, as they plan and deliver activities that recognise diversity and honour difference.

Spotlight: Celebrating cultural heritage

The school celebrates its cultural heritage and diversity through a series of festivals on the themes of Peace, Culture, Family and Health. These focus on different aspects of social, moral and creative development. The Festival of Peace is designed to develop pupils' understanding of themselves and the different cultures within the community. This festival is designed and led by the school's diversity group. They have also focused on 'decolonising' the curriculum in history curriculum. This is highly successful in promoting pupils' understanding of each other, as well as equality and diversity.

There is an established school council, co-ordinated by sixth form pupils and includes representatives from across the school who plan and deliver events. The school successfully links with external charities such as hampers at Christmas and charities linked to the faith of the school to support their work in the community and across the globe. The school celebrates the diversity of its school population through the curriculum and whole-school events. This is a major strength of the school and is central to its ethos and culture.

Pupils are encouraged to discover their 'Welshness' and how they fit into Welsh culture irrespective of their heritage.

The school offers additional leadership opportunities including sixth form pupils being trained as mentors for younger pupils, being part of the school council, Eco-club, Legion of Mary and charity groups.

The safeguarding and pastoral teams evaluate attendance robustly. This approach helps remove barriers to attendance, such as securing transport grants and short-term nurture provision to support reintegration. Family engagement officers work closely with parents and the wider community to support vulnerable pupils. Staff receive updates on attendance regularly and this highlights pupils at risk of low attendance. Form tutors play an important role in monitoring attendance, particularly through one-to-one interviews with pupils. In response to pupil voice, the school has expanded its rewards system, offering a wider range of incentives to encourage good attendance. Despite these strategies, the school's attendance rates remain lower than expected for pupils eligible for free school meals (eFSM).

The Additional Learning Needs (ALN) Team provide a welcoming and supportive environment for the pupils in their care. These committed and well-organised professionals deliver a broad range of interventions, ensuring that pupils receive appropriate academic, social, and life-skills support. The Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCO) provides clear and effective leadership. The ALN team works collaboratively with parents, external agencies and school staff to support learners effectively. The team is making appropriate progress towards meeting the requirements of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act. Pupils with Individual Development Plans (IDPs) benefit from a structured foundation class during their first years in the school. A flexible curriculum enables older pupils to access mainstream GCSE classes as well as bespoke learning pathways. As a result, pupils with ALN make strong progress. The school has helpful transition links with the local college and many of its pupils progress on to further education or training.

Pupils at Bishop Vaughan Catholic School say that they feel safe, secure and valued.

Leading and improving

The headteacher provides calm, reflective and assured leadership, underpinned by a clear vision for raising aspirations and broadening horizons. The principles and teaching of the Catholic faith are at the heart of the school's mission, which contributes to the welcoming and inclusive ethos. Staff understand and share this vision, ensuring that it permeates all aspects of school life.

Senior leaders support the headteacher effectively and have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Their extensive knowledge of their pupils and the wider community informs their decision-making well. This has a positive impact on outcomes for pupils and their well-being. Staff well-being is also a key priority, and leaders foster an open and supportive culture. Regular dialogue ensures that staff feel valued, and contribute to a collaborative, supportive working environment.

Regular focused meetings between the headteacher and senior leaders ensure that they provide consistent messages to staff. Line management processes are clear, and leaders provide appropriate support and challenge for staff at all levels. These arrangements help ensure that staff are engaged fully with the school's improvement priorities. Performance management is linked closely to whole-school priorities and the development needs of individual staff. Leaders take steps to address underperformance supportively but robustly as required.

Leaders have responded effectively to national priorities such as literacy, ALN reform and the development of Curriculum for Wales. They focus strongly on the need to improve the attainment and well-being of pupils eligible for free school meals and those from low-income households. This includes providing additional learning and support through the Learning Zone, engaging productively with families and ensuring that these pupils have fair access to all learning experiences. The school makes effective use of the Pupil Development Grant (PDG) to enhance outcomes for pupils eligible for free school meals and evaluates carefully its use of this funding. However, it has not secured improvements in the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals. There have been recent improvements in the provision for the development of pupils' digital and Welsh language skills, but these are at an early stage of development. Leaders have established a culture of safeguarding, with staff demonstrating a sound understanding of their responsibilities in this area.

The headteacher, business manager and governors monitor the budget carefully ensuring that the school is well resourced, and improvement priorities are funded suitably. The governing body is supportive and provides suitable challenge to school leaders, particularly in relation to pupil outcomes, financial management, and the use of grant funding. Arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking are appropriate and contribute positively to pupils' well-being.

Leaders have developed strong partnerships with parents and stakeholders, establishing effective communication through newsletters and the school website. These opportunities allow parents to engage easily with the school and contribute their views.

Leaders have reviewed thoroughly and refined beneficially the school's self-evaluation processes. Senior and middle leaders regularly conduct a comprehensive range of relevant

activities to identify strengths and areas for development across the school's work. Leaders analyse carefully performance data at Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, and use these analyses proportionately, alongside a broad range of first-hand evidence from lesson observations and work scrutiny. The school consults widely with pupils and staff, as well as parents and other stakeholders. This informs and deepens leaders' knowledge of the impact of their work.

Tailored support for leaders at all levels with respect to improvement processes has supported the school to evaluate more effectively the quality of teaching and the progress that pupils make in lessons and over time. Leaders now have a better-informed view of the quality of teaching. As a result of these strengthened and streamlined self-evaluation activities leaders identify the most urgent improvement areas for the school to focus on alongside important national priorities. They communicate their whole school improvement priorities clearly and widely.

Senior leaders monitor and evaluate the impact of their plans carefully, particularly with respect to aspects of teaching, such as pace, challenge and questioning. Over time, leaders have driven improvements in important areas of the school's work, including mitigating the impact of poverty and disadvantage on pupils' attainment. As a result, these pupils make strong progress, which enables them to go on to further study or training in line with their ambitions and interests.

Overall, curriculum, skills and pastoral middle leaders in Bishop Vaughan understand their roles well, and drive improvement in their areas of responsibility. Many middle leaders have a clear and detailed understanding of their teams' strengths and improvement priorities and make beneficial use of performance data. This gives them an appropriate understanding of pupil outcomes, including those of vulnerable groups along with the quality of teaching, pupil progress and aspects of well-being. However, they do not always focus with sufficient precision on the impact of teaching on learning.

The school uses professional learning effectively to drive improvements in teaching and leadership. Senior leaders ensure that professional learning aligns closely with school improvement priorities, and they evaluate training well to ensure that it has a clear impact on classroom practice. In addition, the school makes effective use of external partnerships to strengthen teaching and leadership skills.

Additional information

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

The school's arrangements for site management 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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