



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

A report on

**Haverfordwest High VC School
Portfield Campus
Scarrowscant Lane
Haverfordwest
Pembrokeshire
SA61 1EP**

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by

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

About Haverfordwest High VC School

Haverfordwest High VC School is an English-medium 11 to 18 mixed community voluntary controlled school in Pembrokeshire. It opened in September 2018, following the closure of Tasker Millward VC School and Sir Thomas Picton School. During its first year, the new school operated on both of the previous school sites. Since November 2019, all pupils are located on the old Tasker Millward site. The school is due to move to a new building in 2022.

The school has 1,625 pupils on roll, including 155 in the sixth form. Around 15% are eligible for free school meals, which is close to the national average of 16.4%. Around 6% live in the 20% most deprived areas of Wales. The proportion of pupils that have a special educational need is 27%, which is above the national average of 22.9%. Around 1% of pupils have statements of special educational needs. This figure is lower than the average of 2.2% for Wales as a whole. Around 1% of pupils have English as an additional language. Most pupils come from a white British background. Only a very few pupils are fluent in Welsh.

The senior leadership team consists of the headteacher, two deputy headteachers, four assistant headteachers and a business manager.

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

During a highly challenging start to the school's existence, the leaders, staff, pupils and governors of Haverfordwest High VC School have shown considerable resilience and a strong commitment to forging and embedding the new school's identity. Despite the substantial challenges that the school has experienced and continues to face, it is beginning to establish itself as an inclusive learning community.

Many pupils make sound progress in their lessons and have a positive attitude to their learning. In the majority of cases, their progress is supported well by effective teaching. However, there is too much variation in the quality of teaching both within and across subject areas. In addition, leaders do not plan well enough for the progressive development of pupils' skills across the curriculum.

The headteacher has a clear vision for the school that is understood clearly by staff. The school is working hard to ensure that this vision is communicated clearly to the local community. In many cases, leaders have sound understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development, and are beginning to secure improvement. However, leadership has not had enough impact on, for example, rates of attendance or the effectiveness of teaching and assessment.

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	Adequate and needs improvement
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Adequate and needs improvement
Teaching and learning experiences	Adequate and needs improvement
Care, support and guidance	Adequate and needs improvement
Leadership and management	Adequate and needs improvement

Recommendations

- R1 Improve pupils' skills by strengthening the leadership and co-ordination of provision for the development of pupils' skills across the curriculum
- R2 Strengthen the role of middle leaders, in particular how they evaluate provision and secure improvement
- R3 Improve the effectiveness of teaching and assessment
- R4 Improve attendance
- R5 Strengthen provision for pupils with special educational needs, in particular how effectively these pupils' targets are set, monitored and reviewed

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will review the school's progress.

Main findings

Standards: Adequate and needs improvement

In lessons, many pupils recall their prior learning suitably and go on to make appropriate progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills. A minority make notably strong progress in their lessons, for example when they develop their understanding of minimalist approaches in music, or when they design and carry out experiments independently in science. However, there is considerable variation in how much progress pupils make, both within and across subject areas. A minority of pupils make only limited progress in lessons.

Many pupils make suitable contributions to class discussion and use subject terminology appropriately. A minority express themselves with maturity and sophistication, for example when they discuss the variety of poetic techniques used in Helen Dumore's 'City Lilacs'. A few pupils, however, have a limited vocabulary and find it difficult to express their ideas clearly.

In many cases, pupils write with suitable technical accuracy. A majority produce a range of appropriately structured extended writing for a variety of purposes and audiences. For example, they use persuasive techniques suitably when writing to the head of UNESCO to argue that women should be allowed to become priests. A few pupils write with fluency, sophistication and style, such as when composing a thoughtful and imaginative inspection report on their school from the 51st century, or when discussing the various ways in which the portrayal of characters in 'Of Mice And Men' reflects social issues in 1930s America.

A minority of pupils do not produce writing of suitable quality. These pupils make frequent basic technical errors and often provide only brief, underdeveloped responses. They do not show sufficient control in their writing, and make inappropriate language choices that do not give their writing the correct tone. Across the ability range, pupils in general do not apply the writing skills that they develop in their English lessons well enough in other subjects.

Many pupils have sound reading skills, and can locate relevant information from texts appropriately. They use inference and deduction suitably, such as when they examine characters from novels and plays or consider the reliability of sources in history. A few demonstrate well-developed higher-order reading skills, for example when summarising, comparing and considering the authors' intentions in a range of articles about extreme sports.

Many pupils have appropriate basic number skills. When given the opportunity, they use these skills suitably across the curriculum, such as when they calculate population density in geography. In general, pupils construct and interpret a range of graphs suitably, for example when comparing current and voltage in a circuit in science. A few pupils, however, produce carelessly constructed and inaccurate graphs.

When given the opportunity, pupils develop their information and communication technology (ICT) skills appropriately across the curriculum, for example when using spreadsheets to investigate crime data. In general, pupils develop their creativity well through a range of subjects. For example, as part of the skills challenge, they use video editing and music software to produce imaginative presentations about child poverty.

Only a minority of pupils achieve a level 2 qualification in Welsh, and in general pupils' Welsh language skills are underdeveloped. A majority of pupils achieve the skills challenge certificate at level 2.

At key stage 4 in 2019, outcomes are generally below expectations. Overall, the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals is below that of the same group of pupils in similar schools. At the end of Year 11, most pupils go on to further education, training or employment.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Adequate and needs improvement

Pupils have played an important role in the development of the positive ethos of their new school. They are, in most instances, enthusiastic about the creation of Haverfordwest High VC School and are keen to play a role in forging its identity.

Most pupils feel safe in school and know who to go to if they need support. They feel confident that the school will deal with any incidents. During the inspection, most pupils behaved well in lessons and around the school. They are courteous and respectful when interacting with adults and other pupils. However, feedback from a minority of pupils through pre-inspection questionnaires was not as positive about behaviour.

Most pupils arrive at lessons ready to learn and many demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning. They listen attentively to their teachers and peers, and work diligently, maintaining their concentration and showing resilience when attempting challenging tasks. These pupils work well in pairs and groups, sharing their ideas and supporting each other's learning. A very few pupils, however, do not focus on their work well enough.

Many pupils have a positive attitude towards healthy lifestyles and have a clear understanding of how to stay healthy. They participate enthusiastically in the wide range of sports and extra-curricular activities the school offers, including the Duke of Edinburgh award, first aid, climbing and art club. Sixth form pupils develop their leadership skills appropriately through mentoring more able and talented younger pupils.

The enthusiastic school council is starting to have an impact on improving aspects of the school's work. They work with external agencies, for example to organise whole-school charity events. The school has recently created 'learning ambassadors' to allow pupils to express their views about what they learn. However, overall, pupils' involvement in decision-making is at an early stage of development.

In 2019, rates of attendance were below expectations, and persistent absence was higher than in similar schools. In particular girls' attendance and their rate of persistent absence do not compare well to levels in similar schools.

Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement

In general, teachers foster positive working relationships with their pupils. In the majority of cases, teachers have strong subject knowledge, communicate clearly and are good language models. These teachers have a clear sense of purpose, and communicate this successfully to their pupils. They plan interesting activities that engage pupils well, and use appropriate questioning to help pupils recall their previous learning. These teachers make effective use of a range of carefully prepared resources to stimulate pupils' interest. They use a variety of approaches to help pupils make sound progress in their knowledge, understanding and skills.

In a few particularly effective lessons, teachers make explicit what pupils should aspire to achieve. They use their detailed knowledge of pupils' prior learning to plan demanding tasks that stretch pupils and help them to make strong progress. They use effective questioning techniques to challenge pupils' thinking and develop their understanding. These teachers monitor pupils' progress closely, and adapt their teaching skilfully to maximise the pace of learning and develop pupils' independence in learning.

In a minority of lessons, teachers do not meet the needs of all pupils well enough. They do not take sufficient account of pupil ability or potential when planning tasks and their expectations are not high enough. Tasks go on for too long or are not challenging enough, which makes the pace of learning too slow. In these lessons, teachers do not develop pupils' skills effectively or provide enough opportunities for them to work independently.

In the majority of instances, teachers provide pupils with helpful feedback to support their progress. A minority of teachers ensure that pupils use this feedback successfully to develop their work. In a minority of cases, although teachers give appropriate guidance, they do not monitor closely enough how well pupils respond, and this limits the impact that their feedback has. Furthermore, a minority of teachers' comments are too vague to support progress usefully. Overall, there is too much variation in the effectiveness of assessment both within and across subject areas.

The school's curriculum meets pupils' needs appropriately, and builds suitably on their experiences from previous key stages. At key stage 4 and in the sixth form, it provides an appropriate range of academic and vocational courses. The school has beneficial arrangements to support and engage vulnerable pupils, including enterprise projects and outdoor pursuits.

In a minority of cases, teachers across the curriculum provide pupils with appropriate opportunities to practise and consolidate their literacy skills. In a few instances, there are meaningful opportunities for pupils to use their numeracy and ICT skills. There is appropriate support for pupils with weaker literacy skills. However, there are no interventions for those requiring support with their numeracy skills. Overall, there is an insufficiently strategic approach to the planning, co-ordination and evaluation of provision to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.

There are appropriate opportunities for pupils to learn about Welsh history and culture across the curriculum, such as when they study the Welsh coal industry and tourism in Pembrokeshire in humanities. Opportunities for pupils to develop and practise their Welsh language skills within or outside of Welsh lessons are underdeveloped.

The school provides suitable learning opportunities to encourage pupils to become ambitious, capable learners. There is a wide range of valuable extra-curricular opportunities that enrich pupils' experiences. These include a school production, orchestras and a variety of sports clubs.

Care, support and guidance: Adequate and needs improvement

Staff have worked with commitment and care to bring together two schools and create a unified school community that has an inclusive and supportive ethos.

The school provides appropriate opportunities for pupils to develop their spiritual and ethical beliefs. Assemblies, form time and the personal and social education programme promote principles that help pupils to develop shared values such as honesty, fairness, justice and sustainability. This contributes appropriately to pupils' ability to make informed decisions around healthy lifestyles. The school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

There are suitable opportunities for pupils, including the most vulnerable, to be involved in decision-making. Recently, the school has strengthened arrangements to give pupils opportunities to influence what and how they learn via the pupils' council and other forums. Pupils are provided with suitable information when selecting subject choices at key stage 4 and for the sixth form. However, guidance regarding future career choices and pathways is underdeveloped.

The school has valuable processes in place for addressing any incidents of bullying. Recently, it has strengthened appropriately its systems for monitoring behaviour and promoting positive attitudes to learning. The behaviour policy is well understood by staff and pupils, and is generally applied consistently by staff. This is having a positive impact on pupils' behaviour and wellbeing.

The school provides a suitable range of interventions for the few pupils who demonstrate poor behaviour. However, there is not always sufficient strategic co-ordination between these different interventions, or with special educational needs provision for these pupils.

Recently, leaders have strengthened appropriately the school's processes for monitoring and supporting pupils with low attendance. However, it is too soon to judge the impact of this on rates of attendance.

The school has recently introduced a comprehensive system to track and monitor the progress and attitudes of pupils and groups at all key stages. This provides leaders with useful oversight of the progress of individual and groups of pupils. They are beginning to make sound use of this information to identify underperformance and put in place suitable support and intervention.

The school provides a wide range of extra-curricular activities to develop pupils' social, creative and physical skills. This includes sporting clubs, a choir, trips abroad and the Duke of Edinburgh awards scheme. In particular, the school develops pupils' creativity purposefully, which helps to develop their self-confidence and independence. It gives pupils valuable opportunities to participate in performances, and has overcome some considerable logistical challenges to stage a successful school performance of 'The Wizard of Oz.'

Recently, the school has taken a range of suitable steps to strengthen its links with parents, carers and the local community, for example through the use of social media and an informative newsletter. Interim and annual reports provide parents and carers with helpful information about their child's progress and attitudes to learning.

Sound links with local primary schools help the school to ensure that pupils, including the most vulnerable, settle well when they transfer to secondary school. The 'Springboard' project, for example, supports family engagement in this process successfully.

Pupils with statements of special educational needs are generally supported appropriately, and annual reviews meet statutory requirements. Pupils' individual development plans set out useful broad approaches for staff to follow to help support these pupils in their classes. However, there is too much inconsistency in how well these plans identify specific targets, or are used to inform teaching approaches and to evaluate progress. In a few instances, pupils' targets remain in place over long periods of time with little evidence of progress.

There is a wide range of valuable provision for pupils with social and emotional needs, and the school liaises well with external agencies to support these pupils. It has beneficial arrangements for pupils who might otherwise struggle to remain in school. This allows these pupils to follow a range of suitable courses and helps them to re-engage with mainstream education.

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

Leadership and management: Adequate and needs improvement

The headteacher and senior leaders have steered the school carefully and thoughtfully through a time of great turbulence. A notable aspect of their leadership is their success in creating a harmonious school community and a strong sense of team spirit amongst pupils and staff, despite the considerable challenges of bringing two schools together and moving between sites.

The headteacher has a clear and ambitious vision for the school. This is based on 'achieving excellence together' and enabling all pupils to realise their potential within a school at the heart of its community. Together with the senior leadership team, she communicates this vision clearly and it is embraced by staff, pupils and governors.

Senior leaders have cultivated a strong ethos of collaboration to achieve common goals. They have established helpful processes to support the school's day-to-day operations and secured clear management systems and lines of accountability. However, leadership has not had sufficient impact on important aspects of the school's work, such as rates of attendance and the provision for skills.

Leaders at all levels are enthusiastic and convey a strong commitment to the school. There is an appropriate system of regular line management meetings, which focus suitably on the school's priorities. Roles and responsibilities are well understood and, in the main, distributed appropriately. However, the school lacks a cohesive strategy for the leadership of the development of pupils' skills across the curriculum.

The school is developing a valuable culture of self-reflection. Leaders at all levels use a suitable range of helpful activities to gain first-hand evidence to inform their self-evaluation. A notable feature is the way in which leaders adapt provision and processes in the light of pupils' feedback. For example, they have made changes to the personal and social education curriculum and in how subjects provide feedback in light of pupils' views. Pupils were consulted extensively regarding the establishment of the new school and are currently being consulted on the plans for the new school building.

Senior leaders know the school's strengths and areas for improvement well in most cases. They identify improvement priorities that match appropriately with self-evaluation findings. However, identified actions for improvement are too numerous, and this makes it difficult for senior leaders to prioritise their work strategically enough. All middle leaders are involved fully in evaluation and improvement processes, and the majority have a sound understanding of the strengths and shortcomings in their areas of responsibility. A minority, however, do not focus consistently enough on the impact of their provision on pupil progress, especially when evaluating pupils' work. Furthermore, a few middle leaders who have responsibility for areas beyond their subject specialism lack sufficient understanding and knowledge of the standards and progress in these areas.

Governors are strongly supportive of the school. They have helpful links with learning areas and an appropriate understanding of many of the school's strengths and areas for development. They are developing suitably as critical friends who provide challenge to the school.

The school has appropriate arrangements for managing the performance of staff and performance management objectives correspond suitably to the school's priorities. Instances of underperformance are dealt with appropriately.

Senior leaders have a clear vision for developing the professional learning of all staff. There is a suitable programme of activities focused on improving teaching and leadership, such as worthwhile opportunities for staff to develop their leadership skills through data analysis training and joint work scrutiny. There are beneficial opportunities available to all staff for collaborative working and sharing good practice. The teaching and learning working group, for instance, enables staff to examine successful classroom practice and share their experiences. These strategies are beginning to have a positive impact on the quality of teaching, although they have had insufficient impact on the effectiveness of assessment.

The headteacher, together with the business manager and governing body, manage the school's resources suitably. They allocate funding appropriately to support identified improvement priorities and monitor expenditure carefully. The school has suitable plans for the use of the pupil development grant, but the use of this funding has not had sufficient impact on the outcomes of vulnerable learners.

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:

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