



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

A report on

Elfed High School

**Mill Lane
Buckley
Flintshire
CH7 3HQ**

Date of inspection: April 2023

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh

About Elfed High School

Name of provider	Elfed High School
Local authority	Flintshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	912
Pupils of statutory school age	911
Number in sixth form	
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 20.2%)	20.6%
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 17.8%)	8.5%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	1.9%
Date of headteacher appointment	09/04/2018
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	09/02/2015
Start date of inspection	24/04/2023

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.

Overview

Elfed High School (EHS) achieves an effective balance between academic attainment and supporting the well-being of its pupils and staff. The school's core values of 'honesty, integrity, respect, high aspirations and self-belief' are at the heart of what it does. Many pupils have a strong sense of belonging, which is reflected in their good behaviour, courtesy and the pride they exhibit in the school. Many have a positive attitude to learning and engage well in lessons, demonstrating maturity when discussing sensitive issues. They participate enthusiastically in the wide range of extra-curricular activities available to them. The support for pupils' well-being is a particular strength of the school. Although, overall, attendance is improving, the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals remains a concern.

The headteacher has a clear vision focused on ensuring every student leaves EHS ready to thrive in the wider community. He has developed and shared the vision well in collaboration with staff, pupils and parents. Staff and governors are passionate about the school and are clear in their intention to provide a good education for all pupils. Leaders collect a broad range of first-hand evidence to evaluate their progress. However, in their evaluations and improvement planning, they focus too closely on operational matters and not precisely enough on the impact that teaching has on pupils' learning.

In the majority of lessons, teachers plan suitably for learning and ensure that activities build well on each other. They have appropriate expectations of what pupils can achieve, provide clear explanations, model learning well and support pupils helpfully so that the majority make at least sound progress. However, in a minority of lessons, teachers do not ensure that pupils make enough progress in their learning. This is mainly because they do not challenge pupils effectively to develop their knowledge and skills or because they overly structure their lessons and limit pupils' opportunities to work independently. The school's curriculum is inclusive and provides an appropriate range of academic and vocational courses at Key Stage 4. The specialist resource base, 'Hafan', is a safe, calm and supportive learning environment in which many of its pupils make good progress in literacy and numeracy skills, but there are fewer opportunities for them to develop other important life skills.

Overall, the majority of pupils at EHS make good progress across the curriculum in writing, speaking and listening. They also demonstrate strong physical skills in PE lessons. Pupils do not make as much progress in their reading, numeracy, digital and Welsh language skills across the curriculum because opportunities for them to do so are underdeveloped. Leaders do not monitor the progress of pupils with additional learning needs carefully enough to be certain that all these pupils are making appropriate progress towards their targets.

Recommendations

- R1 Refine self-evaluation and improvement processes so that they focus sharply on teaching and its impact on pupils' learning

- R2 Improve teaching so that all pupils make the progress they are capable of
- R3 Strengthen processes to monitor the progress of pupils with additional learning needs
- R4 Strengthen the progressive development of reading, numeracy, digital and Welsh language skills across the curriculum
- R5 Improve the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

The majority of pupils at Elfed High School (EHS) make suitable progress in their learning and a minority make strong progress. In a few subjects, pupils make particularly strong progress although a minority do not make as much progress as they should, mainly because of shortcomings in teaching. In a minority of cases, while pupils learn to answer examination questions, they do not develop their conceptual understanding well enough. Overall, pupils with additional learning needs make suitable progress towards their targets. Many pupils in the specialist resource base 'Hafan', make good progress in developing their literacy and numeracy skills from their different starting points. They respond well to questions from their teacher and often use Welsh spontaneously and accurately in their responses.

Most pupils across the school listen well to their teachers and peers. They provide brief verbal responses to teachers' questions. A few pupils are highly articulate and explain their thinking clearly using a broad and sophisticated vocabulary. Many pupils do not develop their responses well enough. The majority of pupils collaborate well, when for example discussing poetic techniques in 'The Crowd Gathers'. They use a suitable range of vocabulary, including subject-specific terminology. However, a minority of pupils are reluctant to participate in pair and group work. A very few do not listen well enough to their teachers' instructions and explanations.

Many pupils locate key words and extract information from a range of suitable texts. The majority make good use of their findings, such as when quoting phrases that develop aspects of character or context in the novel 'Heroes'. The majority of more able pupils demonstrate the ability to make inferences, for example when analysing sources about crime in Victorian Britain. In general, pupils read aloud with clarity, fluency and expression. Overall, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to

develop their advanced reading skills across the curriculum. A minority of pupils do not always show understanding of basic instructional texts.

Many pupils write well at length across the curriculum. They communicate their ideas clearly and organise their writing appropriately. In general, pupils show pride in their work and write neatly and legibly. They have a secure grasp of subject terminology and use this accurately. Many produce extended writing that is suitable for the subject and technically accurate, for example when discussing ethical considerations around the battery farming of chickens in science. A few pupils write in a detailed and coherent manner, explaining clearly a writer's intention and their own appreciation of style. However, often pupils rely too much on teachers' support when developing their writing, which restricts their independent writing skills. A minority make regular spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors.

In general, in their Welsh lessons pupils make suitable progress in their ability to use the Welsh language. They can locate key terms in simple texts and identify mistakes, which helps them build their vocabulary and develop their spelling. A few pupils write with reasonable accuracy with support from their teachers. A few are developing their grasp of the language strongly and use Welsh idioms appropriately when expressing their opinions. In Key Stage 4, pupils build on these skills to read longer texts in Welsh for comprehension. They use their knowledge and skills to write extended descriptions of themselves. Due to a lack of opportunities, pupils do not use their Welsh language skills outside of Welsh lessons frequently enough.

Many pupils have sound basic numeracy skills and are able to apply these in suitably challenging tasks in maths lessons. The majority are able to calculate well using both mental and written methods. Many pupils are able to construct and plot line graphs accurately or determine a line of best fit on a scatter graph, for example in biology lessons when considering the impact of salt concentration on the rate of osmosis.

When given the opportunity to do so, many pupils develop their digital skills well. For example, they produce infographics, web pages and videos as revision resources in digital technology. They use tabulated data in Excel to generate simple embedded bar charts and then analyse the data purposefully. In their technology lessons, many pupils manipulate images confidently from the internet in 2D design software to create templates ready for laser cutting when producing jewellery. A few pupils develop their computational thinking skills suitably when planning the sequencing of lighting for the school production. However, pupils do not develop more advanced digital skills well enough across the curriculum.

In a minority of lessons, pupils develop their thinking skills well, for example when considering the societal and legal implications of female genital mutilation. A few pupils use their knowledge and understanding to reason and think strategically, such as when analysing the most effective ways to win points in badminton. In general, pupils are not given enough opportunities to develop and extend their thinking.

When given the opportunity, pupils develop their creative skills beneficially, such as when experimenting with and learning to play the ukulele in music. In art, many pupils create interesting surreal collages of their own faces, imitating the work of German artist, Annegret Soltau. Pupils also develop their creative skills suitably when

presenting in the Tunnocks Teacake Challenge and the Elfed Extra Christmas Cake club.

Many pupils develop their physical skills well, such as their co-ordination when learning how to jump over hurdles in athletics. They show good levels of physical fitness and can sustain effort for extended periods of time. Most pupils display good hand-eye co-ordination in their physical education lessons, for example when performing a variety of shots in badminton.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Pupils are proud to be a part of EHS where there is a strong sense of belonging to the school community. Most pupils demonstrate well the school's core values of respect, honesty, integrity, high aspirations and self-belief in lessons and around the school. The majority of pupils say that they enjoy school. Many feel safe and are clear about a trusted adult they can turn to if they need support.

Pupils are welcoming towards visitors and communicate confidently and courteously with staff and peers. Many pupils behave well in lessons and around the school, are punctual and settle quickly to work. They move around the school in a civilised and orderly manner. However, a few pupils do not engage suitably with their work, disrupt others and talk over the teacher in lessons.

Generally, pupils understand how to make healthy lifestyle choices supported by the provision of free fruit for all. Many participate in extra-curricular activities from the rich variety on offer, including coding, chess, and dodgeball clubs.

When given the opportunity, pupils develop their leadership skills well, for example in roles such as anti-bullying and sports ambassadors, as senior students, and members of the school council. The school council is active and has supported charitable work, including setting up a foodbank. Members of the school council are involved in recruiting staff, improving outdoor spaces, changing the school menu, and extending the curriculum to incorporate well-being lessons for Year 10 pupils.

Pupil attendance has improved since the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below that of their peers.

Nearly all pupils who attend 'Hafan' say they feel happy, safe and well there. They enjoy being with their friends and have positive relationships with the teachers and support staff. They are all able to express clearly who they turn to for support. Most attend school regularly, behave well and display highly positive attitudes to learning. Most show respect towards their peers and staff and many concentrate well in lessons, persevering in tasks and activities.

Teaching and learning experiences

Teachers in EHS know their pupils well and create a calm learning environment. Generally, they manage pupil behaviour well. Most teachers have strong subject knowledge and reinforce subject-specific terminology helpfully. Many have established beneficial routines that support pupils in settling to their work and engaging with their learning.

In a few cases, where pupils make particularly strong progress, teachers plan activities that are especially engaging. These teachers provide high levels of challenge and model their expectations to pupils well. They question pupils skilfully to probe and deepen their knowledge and understanding, and to help them improve their verbal responses. They also plan carefully to ensure that pupils develop their independent learning and thinking skills well.

In the majority of cases, teaching helps pupils to make at least sound progress in their learning. In these lessons, teachers plan thoughtfully to provide engaging resources and activities that build well on each other. They offer clear explanations, model learning helpfully, and have suitable expectations of what pupils can achieve. In addition, they use a range of worthwhile strategies to monitor pupils' progress and adapt their teaching in response.

In a minority of lessons, pupils do not make enough progress. This is often because teachers provide too much support for them, overly scaffold tasks or present for too long. This limits pupils' opportunities to apply and develop their learning and skills independently. These teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can do and often provide them with shortcuts to complete tasks rather than helping them to develop their understanding of important concepts. In a few instances, teachers do not intervene quickly enough when pupils are off task and disengaged.

The majority of teachers use questioning suitably to check pupils' understanding and to check recall of important facts. However, overall, questioning is not used well enough to deepen pupils' learning or develop their thinking skills.

The majority of teachers circulate the classroom well and provide clear and helpful verbal feedback to pupils about how they can improve their work. They also provide helpful written feedback that identifies clearly what pupils have done well and how they could improve. They also ensure that pupils respond to their guidance. In a minority of instances, teachers over-praise simplistic responses or do not identify misconceptions precisely enough. Peer and self-assessment activities are not always used effectively and are occasionally unhelpful and time-consuming.

The school keeps parents and carers well informed about their child's progress, for example through parents' evenings, and interim and full reports. Reports to parents include concise information about their child's achievement and progress, along with helpful advice on how to improve.

EHS has a suitably broad, balanced and inclusive curriculum which meets the needs of most pupils. Pupils in Key Stage 4 study an appropriate range of academic and vocational courses including hospitality and catering, engineering and sports. This is supported further by a valuable range of additional qualifications such as preparation for the world of work, emergency first aid, and health and safety at work.

The school's provision for more able pupils includes a variety of beneficial opportunities to explore and study more challenging topics, such as Welsh literary heritage and microbiology, through masterclasses. Pupils in 'Hafan' follow suitable courses to gain worthwhile GCSE or alternative qualifications. There are further opportunities for these pupils to work in the school garden and take part in life skills

sessions. However, the range of experiences across the areas of learning in 'Hafan' is limited mainly to literacy and mathematics.

In collaboration with key stakeholders and partner primary schools, leaders have established a clear vision and are preparing well for the formal implementation of Curriculum for Wales in September 2023. When planning, leaders prioritise clearly the development of authentic learning experiences to ensure progress in pupils' knowledge and understanding.

Teachers plan good opportunities for pupils to practise and apply their oracy and extended writing across many subjects. There are also a few meaningful opportunities for pupils to apply aspects of their numeracy skills in a few relevant subjects other than mathematics. However, planning for the progressive development of reading, numeracy and digital skills across the age ranges is underdeveloped.

The school has recently reviewed and relaunched its personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme under the new well-being curriculum. This, complemented by other subjects across the curriculum, provides worthwhile opportunities for pupils to learn about the history and experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. Pupils develop their understanding of equality and diversity well.

School leaders promote the Welsh language, culture and heritage suitably and provide pupils with opportunities to celebrate being Welsh during the school Eisteddfod and 'Wythnos Cymraeg'. The provision for developing pupils' formal and informal use of the Welsh language, and for promoting the advantages of multilingualism, is underdeveloped.

The 'Elfed Extra' activities provide a worthwhile range of opportunities for pupils to represent the school and develop their wider skills through a good range of extra-curricular clubs and events. The school enriches pupils' learning experiences through a variety of educational visits and opportunities to learn outside the classroom. This includes pupils travelling to Iceland, going skiing in Italy, visiting museums, and attending performances at the theatre.

Care, support and guidance

EHS is a caring and friendly community. Pupils are nurtured in an environment where working relationships between staff and pupils are strong. The school's values are promoted effectively and permeate all aspects of the school's work. Pupil rewards are linked closely with these values and are well received by pupils and their parents.

The support for pupils' well-being is a strength of the school. Discreet well-being lessons cover a comprehensive range of relevant topics such as healthy living, e-safety and human rights. During form tutor periods and school assemblies, staff provide effective opportunities to develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Staff work well with a wide range of external agencies, such as the police and mental health services, to support pupils with their personal, social and emotional well-being.

In response to the views of staff, pupils and parents, the school has recently revised the school code of conduct and introduced a 'Belonging' policy. These initiatives are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' behaviour. Pastoral leaders use behaviour and achievement data well to track the impact of their work and plan for improvement. This has enabled staff to recognise the need to strengthen their approaches to deal with bullying and they have refined their procedures beneficially. Attendance is monitored robustly and the school uses an appropriate range of interventions, which has contributed to an improvement in attendance figures. However, the attendance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals continues to be a concern.

Leaders have a good understanding of some aspects of the progress individual pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) are making. However, overall, they are not clear about the progress pupils with ALN make against their targets and do not evaluate the effectiveness of the provision closely enough. Staff receive regular professional learning to ensure that they are equipped with suitable strategies for supporting pupils with different needs in their lessons.

The school has a range of useful interventions to support specific pupils. 'Aspirations' provides a nurturing environment for pupils experiencing social and emotional difficulties where they develop valuable life skills such as swimming and gardening. In 'Futures', pupils experiencing anxiety receive sensitive support and valuable opportunities to develop their skills and subject knowledge. 'The Rise' is an off-site provision for vulnerable pupils which offers them a curriculum to develop their social and academic skills.

There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including sports and cultural clubs, such as the gardening club. The school provides worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop their citizenship by supporting the local foodbank and other charities in the wider community. There is a range of beneficial leadership opportunities with pupil groups, such as the LGBTQ+ group, the School Nutrition Action Group and digital leaders. Staff listen to the views of pupils, for example when they recently introduced theme days in the school canteen to celebrate food from different countries and cultures.

The 'Smooth Moves' transition programme enables pupils to settle well in the school in Year 7. Pupils receive useful information when making option choices or decisions about future learning and a comprehensive range of careers guidance, which includes worthwhile opportunities to take part in work experience.

'Hafan' is a local authority resource for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is a safe, calm and supportive learning environment. Over time, many pupils make good progress in their literacy, numeracy and Welsh language skills. They follow a suitable range of qualifications and develop some important life skills, for example when visiting local cafés and planning their own journeys using bus timetables.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. All staff receive regular training on a wide range of issues and are well informed on how to keep pupils safe.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides thoughtful and passionate leadership and has created an ethos of trust and collegiality within the school. He is supported well by the deputy headteacher and the senior team. In partnership with staff, pupils and parents, senior leaders have developed and shared a clear vision for the school focused on ensuring every student leaves EHS ready to thrive in the wider community. The headteacher models leadership values and expectations well, has high expectations of all staff, and deploys them appropriately to make best use of their skills.

The headteacher has revised the roles and responsibilities of the senior team so that they are well balanced and equitable. These roles are understood well within the school and staff know where to go to access support and seek advice. There is an ethos of teamwork and collaboration that permeates the school and many senior leaders understand and discharge their roles well. Leaders place well-being, including that of staff, at the heart of everything they do. Their strong focus on maintaining manageable levels of workload is appreciated by staff.

Generally, leaders at all levels have a suitable understanding of line management processes. Middle leaders value the support they receive from senior leaders and generally find line management processes to be both appropriately supportive and challenging, especially in relation to data. However, these processes focus too much on operational matters and not enough on the quality of teaching or the impact that it has on pupils' learning and skills. As a result, senior leaders have not enabled many middle leaders to have an accurate enough view of their department's work. This makes it difficult for them to identify the specific aspects of their work they are aiming to improve precisely enough.

Leaders at all levels carry out a range of appropriate self-evaluation activities. However, too often, they focus too strongly on summative data rather than considering well enough the progress that pupils make in lessons and over time. Consequently, leaders at all levels have an overly positive view of these important aspects of the school's work. Although they identify broadly suitable areas for improvement, they are not always precise enough about the specific aspects that require improvement or how they will know if their strategies have had an impact on pupils' learning.

Governors are passionate about the school and are clear in their intention to provide the best education for all pupils. They monitor the school's financial situation suitably and understand their role well in terms of safeguarding and the promotion of healthy eating and drinking. In addition, they are clear about the school's role in mitigating against the effects of poverty on educational attainment. Governors offer helpful challenge to the school regarding aspects of its work, such as improving the quality of food provided in the school canteen.

Financial planning is sound. Senior leaders and governors have a clear understanding of the current budget position and projected spending. The business manager works diligently to monitor and plan spending.

Leaders are committed to reducing the barriers to learning for pupils who are eligible for free school meals or from low-income families. They have developed systems to

identify pupils' individual barriers to learning and make appropriate use of the pupil development grant to support these pupils and their families. Evaluation of the impact of this work, however, is underdeveloped.

The school has suitable arrangements for performance management, which are linked appropriately to professional learning activities and staff have beneficial opportunities to discuss the aspects of their practice they would like to improve. Although targets are linked appropriately to the professional standards, they are often too broad and success criteria do not relate closely enough to the targets set.

The school has a strong commitment to professional learning and has a suitable programme of support for all staff. Leaders have developed a reflective culture in which staff are willing to talk about their strengths and areas for improvement. The professional learning programme is supported well by external partners to provide helpful opportunities for staff to share effective practice. Professional learning has had an impact on a few important aspects of the school's work, for example the quality of written feedback and opportunities for extended writing. However, it has not had enough impact on other important areas, such as teaching for understanding and the level of challenge for pupils, in a minority of lessons. This is often because leaders' evaluations do not focus closely enough on the impact of teaching on learning.

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

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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