



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

A report on

Monmouth Comprehensive School

**Old Dixton Road
Monmouth
Monmouthshire
NP25 3YT**

Date of inspection: February 2023

by

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

This report is also available in Welsh.

About Monmouth Comprehensive School

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| Name of provider | Monmouth Comprehensive School |
| Local authority | Monmouthshire County Council |
| Language of the provider | English |
| Type of school | Secondary |
| Religious character | * |
| Number of pupils on roll | 1684 |
| Pupils of statutory school age | 1341 |
| Number in sixth form | 343 |
| 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%) | 10.9% |
| 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%) | 19.5% |
| Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home | 0.9% |
| Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language | 0.7% |
| Date of headteacher appointment | 01/09/2020 |
| Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable) | 17/11/2015 |
| Start date of inspection | 13/02/2023 |

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

Monmouth Comprehensive School is a vibrant and inclusive community. It is situated in an inspiring building, opened in 2018, which is full of space and light. The facilities contribute positively to pupils' learning and well-being. Staff make good use of these facilities, for example in developing pupils' creativity and physical skills. Many pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), make good progress in literacy, numeracy and digital skills, and a minority make strong progress. A few pupils are notably articulate in speaking and highly effective in writing. Many pupils think critically and reflectively, and a few have exceptional creative skills. A few pupils do not sustain their concentration well enough in lessons and this hinders their progress.

Most pupils enjoy school and behave well inside and outside of lessons. They are respectful, courteous and confident. The specialist resource base (SRB) for pupils with a wide range of complex learning difficulties is a highly inclusive environment, in which these pupils thrive, and they integrate well into mainstream activities when appropriate. Nearly all pupils in the sixth form display exemplary attitudes to learning and most make good progress. Overall, pupils' attendance has not recovered to pre-pandemic levels and the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals is a cause for concern.

Since his appointment, the headteacher has provided a clear impetus for continuous school improvement that aims to enable all pupils to achieve their potential and enhance their future life-chances. Leaders aim to achieve this through high quality teaching that supports the implementation of Curriculum for Wales. They know the school well but do not always evaluate the impact of teaching on pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills precisely enough.

The school has a coherent approach to professional learning, particularly the development of shared terminology and teaching strategies, which is having a positive impact on learning and teaching. In many cases, teachers' enthusiasm for their subject and thoughtful lesson planning helps pupils to make good progress. The curriculum builds well on pupils' prior learning from previous key stages and there is a wide range of further enrichment activities available for them. The provision to develop pupils' appreciation of Welsh heritage and culture is underdeveloped. In addition, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to develop their ability to speak Welsh.

Pupils' well-being is a high priority for the school and senior leaders have established a strong safeguarding culture which meets the needs of nearly all pupils. The well-being curriculum has been developed collaboratively with pupils to provide beneficial support for their physical, emotional and mental health.

Recommendations

- R1 Strengthen processes to raise the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals
- R2 Refine self-evaluation processes so that they focus more precisely on the impact of provision on pupils' learning
- R3 Ensure that pupils have sufficient opportunities to learn about the language, culture and heritage of Wales

What happens next

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

Estyn will invite the school to prepare case studies for dissemination on Estyn's website on its work in relation to:

1. its approaches to developing Curriculum for Wales
2. the inclusivity and integration of the specialist resource base

Main evaluation

Learning

Many pupils recall their prior learning securely and make good progress. A minority make strong progress and apply their knowledge and skills confidently in new contexts. A few pupils make limited progress because they do not engage sufficiently with learning activities or sustain their concentration well enough. Many pupils with ALN make sound progress against their targets. Nearly all pupils in the SRB make good progress over time, especially in relation to developing their social and communication skills.

Most pupils listen well to their teachers and peers, which helps them to understand what they need to do and build on others' contributions. They work together well when working in groups. Many contribute well to class discussions and the majority do so confidently. They express their ideas clearly and sensitively. For example, they discuss in a sensible and mature way the impact of using the wrong pronouns when addressing someone who is non-binary. The majority participate appropriately in 'turn and talk' activities but a minority do not always make the most of these opportunities. A minority of pupils respond in detail to teachers' questions, using appropriate subject terminology, and pose questions of their own to further their learning. A few pupils are notably articulate, and their speech includes a broad and sophisticated vocabulary, using words such as 'melancholic', 'illusory' and 'proxemics' in their correct context. However, a few pupils struggle to explain their thinking clearly and use only a basic vocabulary.

Most pupils can locate information suitably and identify important ideas in texts, such as when considering different views on the cultural significance of the Titanic in history. Many pupils highlight and annotate texts helpfully to demonstrate their understanding of key points and select relevant quotations to support their opinions. The majority of pupils infer and deduce effectively from texts, for example when considering the impact of tropical storms on low-income and high-income countries. They offer thoughtful interpretations of poetry, such as Abse's 'Return to Cardiff'. A few pupils infer skilfully from multi-media texts in a variety of subjects. A minority of pupils do not apply a wide enough range of reading strategies to support their learning. For example, they struggle to read beyond the literal meaning of a text.

Most pupils develop their writing in commendable detail, such as when discussing the causes and implications of suffering in religion, values and ethics. Many pupils use a wide range of vocabulary, producing writing that is well structured and technically accurate. The majority of pupils write well in a range of formats and styles, including annotated diagrams, mind maps, design plans and evaluations. In general, more able pupils write with perception and clarity, matching tone and style effectively to purpose and audience. They construct logical and persuasive arguments using varied sentence structures and appropriate rhetorical devices. However, a few pupils make regular spelling and grammatical errors and present work untidily. A few pupils rely on copying information or examples instead of writing independently.

In Welsh lessons, the majority of pupils locate information suitably in texts. They use reading strategies appropriately to work out the meaning of new words. Around half

write simple sentences in Welsh with support from their teacher. A few pupils write accurately in greater detail using checklists of success criteria to assist them. However, the majority struggle to pronounce Welsh words and phrases clearly and accurately and around half are unable to write basic sentences independently. The majority make common spelling and grammar errors when writing Welsh.

Many pupils have a firm grasp of number skills. They are able to calculate using the four rules fluently and have a secure understanding of place value. For example, they apply their understanding of the four rules, percentages and ratio to choose from a number of different options for annual salary bonuses. They have a suitable understanding of shapes and measures and apply these skills well. They can calculate areas and perimeters accurately. In their science lessons, pupils use their understanding of powers of 10 to convert between different metric units. A minority of pupils have strong numeracy skills. For example, they use trigonometry to calculate missing angles and sides in 3D shapes. A few pupils have weak number skills and do not have a secure understanding of number concepts.

Many pupils have sound data handling skills. They calculate averages and variation and choose the most appropriate type of graph to display data. The majority of pupils analyse charts and graphs to draw sensible conclusions, such as when looking at trends in the effect of atmospheric disasters on death rates and economic losses in different countries. However, a minority of pupils do not draw graphs accurately or analyse their graphs or findings in sufficient depth.

In general, pupils develop and apply their digital skills appropriately in a suitable range of contexts. For example, they consider the reliability of information on websites about businesses and celebrities in computing. In art, pupils create animations based on favourite works of art and, in technology, they construct online fact files which are then used in the design process.

In general, pupils develop their physical skills suitably, such as when they improve their swimming technique in physical education lessons. Many pupils are curious and ask insightful questions, for example when exploring the structure of the solar system. Many pupils develop their creativity well such as when devising freeze frames to depict a storyline in drama. A few pupils demonstrate exceptional creative skills in art and textiles, such as when producing a sculpture of the human head or designing clothes from waste products.

In the sixth form, most pupils have positive attitudes to learning. They listen intently to explanations and to the contributions of their peers in lessons. They develop their understanding of advanced concepts well and apply them accurately, for example when working out the force of repulsion between two charges in physics. They build their knowledge and understanding in a coherent and logical manner. They analyse texts perceptively, for example when considering how Homer creates sympathy for Odysseus in classical civilisation or discussing Bronte's use of gothic imagery in English lessons.

Many pupils recall prior learning well, for example, the difference between meiosis and mitosis and the role of mitochondria in biology. In mathematics, pupils apply their understanding of measure of location and spread to situations where there is more than one random variable. Pupils evaluate the impact of Welsh Chartism, in history,

on the failure of Chartism overall. In computer science they use their knowledge of operating systems to understand time slice scheduling and the function of the main parts of an operating system in greater detail.

Many sixth form pupils contribute willingly to discussions, explaining their reasoning well. They have a sophisticated subject-specific vocabulary and use this precisely. A few pupils are exceptionally articulate speakers and highly effective writers. Many pupils demonstrate advanced numeracy and problem-solving skills. A minority of pupils make complex links between different topics, for example using the inverse square law when calculating gravitational or electrostatic forces.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Most pupils feel proud to be part of Monmouth Comprehensive School. They enjoy school and say that they are free from physical and verbal abuse. If they have any problems, most pupils say that they have a trusted adult to turn to. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe in school, in the wider community and online.

Most pupils are respectful and courteous to their peers, staff and visitors. When asked about their views on different aspects of their school experience, pupils are confident in expressing their opinions and willing to make a positive contribution to the dialogue. There are positive working relationships between pupils and teachers. Nearly all pupils understand the school's relationships and behaviour policy and behave well around the school.

Pupils develop their confidence well through participation in extra-curricular provision and value the opportunities offered to them through this programme. There are high levels of regular participation in activities, which include rowing club, board games club and ukulele club. Most pupils understand how to make healthy lifestyle choices. For example, in well-being lessons, they discuss healthy relationships, healthy eating and exercise, and the impact of these on their well-being.

Pupils across the school, including those who access the SRB, take on leadership opportunities. These pupils carry out their roles with enthusiasm and maturity and develop their personal and social skills successfully. The school council has influenced decisions the school has taken about mobile phone policy, breaktime provision and the relationships and behaviour policy. Sixth form pupils benefit from opportunities to develop their leadership skills as prefects. Their roles include organising leadership opportunities for pupils in the lower school.

In lessons, many pupils arrive promptly, settle quickly, and are ready to learn. They collaborate effectively in pair and group work. They have positive attitudes to learning and participate willingly, though a few struggle to persevere with their work. Nearly all pupils in the sixth form exhibit exemplary attitudes to learning. Most are enthusiastic and curious, and show confidence when asking and answering probing questions and discussing their own work.

The attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals is much lower than the school average and is a cause for concern.

Teaching and learning experiences

Most teachers establish positive working relationships with pupils. This enables them to create a calm, purposeful learning environment that helps to support pupil progress. In many cases, teachers' passion for and sound knowledge of their subject enthuses pupils and leads them to engage fully in their learning. These teachers carefully plan sequences of activities that build well on pupils' prior knowledge and understanding. They use a variety of engaging approaches and resources, provide clear explanations and suitably demanding tasks, and use questioning appropriately to check pupils' progress. This has a positive impact on pupils' development of their knowledge, understanding and skills.

In a minority of instances, teachers have notably high expectations of what pupils can achieve. In these cases, teachers meticulously plan a variety of challenging activities and use questioning adeptly to deepen and probe pupils' understanding to ensure strong progress.

In a few instances, teachers do not develop pupils' independence in their learning well enough. They talk too much or give pupils too much guidance regarding written tasks, which denies them the opportunity to develop their thinking independently. These teachers do not ensure that all pupils engage fully in their learning, particularly during discussion activities.

Teaching in the SRB is highly effective. Teachers use a wide variety of strategies that are carefully matched to pupils' individual needs. This includes multi-sensory approaches and a range of practical activities, such as cookery, gardening in the community and working in the school food hall. This helps these pupils to make good progress, especially in their social and communication skills.

In many cases, teachers give pupils helpful verbal feedback during lessons. As a result of written guidance from teachers, a minority of pupils improve their work well. However, inconsistencies within subject areas sometimes limit the impact of this aspect of their work. Reports to parents are clear and easy to understand, and contain useful information about pupils' progress and attitudes to learning, although they do not contain individual targets for improvement. The school has robust systems for monitoring pupils' progress, and it uses this information effectively to put in place a wide variety of helpful interventions.

The school's curriculum builds well on pupils' prior learning from previous key stages, and successfully meets the needs of nearly all pupils. At both Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, the school provides a comprehensive range of courses, which includes academic and vocational options. Courses such as psychology, the built environment, classics, further mathematics, engineering and three modern foreign languages enhance the curriculum offer. Pupils are consulted well during the process of choosing their options, and most pupils are able to study the subjects of their choice. There is a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities for pupils, which enhances the formal curriculum. This includes subject clubs and a variety of enrichment opportunities.

Pupils in the SRB receive relevant and appropriate learning experiences that meet the extensive range of these pupils' needs effectively. Where appropriate, they

benefit from accessing carefully chosen aspects of mainstream provision. At the end of their time at school, they achieve an appropriate range of bespoke qualifications.

The school has a clear vision for the Curriculum for Wales. This is based on disciplinary curriculum design where pupils are provided with valuable opportunities to develop in-depth subject knowledge and their literacy, numeracy and digital skills in authentic contexts. Leaders recognise the importance of good teaching and place it at the heart of their curriculum developments. This year, the school has introduced its curriculum for Year 7. Staff continue to trial different approaches, followed by rigorous evaluation and refinement. Leaders have worked closely with partner primary schools to ensure that the learning experiences in Year 7 build well on pupils' previous experiences.

The literacy and numeracy co-ordinators work effectively with subject leaders to ensure that the opportunities offered to pupils to develop their skills across the curriculum are worthwhile and provide a suitable level of challenge. The provision is well co-ordinated, and these leaders have a good overview of it. In relevant subjects across the curriculum, pupils are provided with valuable opportunities to apply their numeracy skills in different contexts. In addition, there are suitable opportunities for pupils to solve worded and multi-step problems within mathematics. There is a wide range of beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy skills across the curriculum, particularly their extended writing skills. However, teachers' feedback on pupils' literacy skills is inconsistent, both within and across departments. There are suitable arrangements in place to support pupils who have weak basic reading and numeracy skills. These include tailored interventions delivered by staff and sixth form pupils.

Within computing lessons and across the curriculum, pupils are provided with suitable opportunities to develop their digital skills. For example, in art and design, pupils use digital drawing packages to present their designs, and in science they use software to design circuit boards.

Through the well-being lessons, assemblies, registration periods and across the curriculum, pupils are provided with valuable opportunities to develop their social and emotional skills, and their appreciation of equality and diversity. For example, during well-being lessons, pupils discuss what constitutes healthy and unhealthy relationships. There are a few opportunities for pupils to develop their appreciation of Welsh heritage and culture such as the school Eisteddfod, 'Diwrnod Sumai shwmai' and 'Dydd miwsig Cymru'. At the end of Key Stage 4, most pupils achieve a GCSE qualification in Welsh. However, in general, the provision to develop pupils' appreciation of Welsh heritage and culture is underdeveloped. In addition, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to develop their ability to speak Welsh.

Care, support and guidance

Monmouth Comprehensive School is a caring and inclusive community where staff and pupils' well-being is a priority. The school continuously promotes integrity and empathy towards others through its 'work hard, be kind' whole-school ethos.

The well-being team place a strong emphasis on reducing barriers to learning such as the impact of poverty. They work closely with a variety of external partners to provide effective, tailored support for those pupils who need it most.

Support for pupils with ALN and other barriers to learning is a particular strength. The additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCO) has a clear vision for how the school identifies needs and provides pupils with individualised support. The ALNCO is supported well by the ALN team. All staff are updated regularly and access important information to inform their planning. The ALN team have nurtured valuable relationships with the parents of pupils with ALN and pupils and parents have a key role in the pupil-centred review meetings. Processes for monitoring and tracking the progress of pupils with ALN are robust and reviewed regularly. There is valuable support for pupils to develop their emotional literacy through worthwhile interventions.

Staff in the SRB provide high levels of care and support for pupils with an extensive range of needs. Pupils who attend the SRB are given valuable opportunities to develop their life skills through a wide variety of activities, which they value highly. They access mainstream lessons where appropriate, and staff prepare them well to integrate with the wider school community.

The relationships and behaviour policy provides staff with valuable strategies for dealing effectively with behaviour, although in a very few instances this is applied inconsistently. Staff work purposefully with the local authority's 'Dalen Newydd' provision, based within the school, to support pupils with behavioural challenges. In general, the school responds to allegations of bullying appropriately. However, the lack of clarity of some roles and responsibilities within the pastoral team means that a very few incidents are not dealt with effectively enough.

Senior leaders promote a culture of safeguarding throughout the school successfully. Policy and procedures for reporting concerns are clear and robust. Staff receive appropriate and regular training, which helps them to recognise any potential harms and understand their roles and responsibilities in keeping pupils safe. Staff work well with external agencies when responding to child protection concerns and brokering support for pupils and their families. There are comprehensive arrangements for the safe recruitment of staff and others who are in contact with pupils.

The school implements a range of beneficial strategies to help pupils understand how to keep themselves safe. For example, discrete well-being lessons provide pupils with worthwhile opportunities to discuss the importance of healthy relationships, and form time activities encourage pupils to challenge discrimination. Overall, the school helps pupils well with their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

There are suitable systems and procedures to monitor attendance and appropriate interventions for pupils with low attendance. However, currently this is not having enough impact on improving the attendance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals.

All pupils have access to a comprehensive programme of extra-curricular opportunities. There are many sporting clubs where pupils develop their physical skills and teamwork, for example the popular school rowing club. Pupils also benefit

from a range of opportunities to enhance their creative skills through school productions and various musical ensembles.

There are valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their leadership skills, for example through the school council, pupil-led groups such as the 'Gender and Sexuality Alliance' and the well-being ambassadors programme. The school gathers pupils' and parents' views through various surveys to inform future decisions suitably, such as when evaluating the effectiveness of the well-being curriculum.

Staff work well with partner organisations, including Careers Wales, to guide pupils with their next steps enabling them to make informed choices when moving on to the next stage of their life.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides thoughtful and ambitious leadership. He is supported well by the senior leadership team who are well respected and trusted by the school community. Their strong leadership managed the school through the COVID-19 pandemic successfully and has had a positive effect on important aspects of the school's work such as the culture of safeguarding, curriculum development and professional learning. The maxim 'work hard, be kind' underpins the expectations for all members of the school community.

The capacity of the senior leadership team has been increased recently and responsibilities reviewed to ensure that they focus clearly on the school's priorities and make best use of the skills and interests of individual staff. These responsibilities are delegated sensibly, defined clearly, and understood well. Line management arrangements are clear and middle leaders are held to account suitably. They benefit from frequent, robust discussions with senior leaders about what and how they teach. However, these discussions do not always focus well enough on the impact teaching has on pupils' learning and skills development. The school makes good use of robust performance management processes and instructional coaching to improve the practice of all staff, including any who are underperforming.

Nearly all middle leaders understand well and are supportive of the school's improvement priorities. They are also clear about their role in securing progress against whole school targets such as curriculum development. The school has increased the capacity of the pastoral team by appointing pastoral support officers for Key Stages 3 and 4, though it is not clear enough how their roles combine with the directors of learning in the respective key stages.

Leaders drive a range of quality assurance processes that provides a continuous approach to improvement. These processes support robust professional dialogue around how to achieve high quality provision but do not always focus well enough on the impact that teaching has on the development of pupils' skills in particular. Consequently, it is more difficult for leaders to be precise enough about the aspects of their work they are aiming to improve or about what success might look like.

The school has a highly strategic approach to professional learning that is closely integrated with its other improvement processes. A wide range of professional learning opportunities are planned carefully to meet the needs of subject areas and

individual staff. Leaders have established clearly understood principles that underpin this work and ensure that it supports whole-school improvement priorities effectively. This includes a well-understood shared terminology regarding teaching approaches that benefits both staff and pupils. Staff have regular, helpful opportunities to share good practice within and across subject areas. Professional learning activities are supported well by work with external agencies where appropriate. Leaders evaluate these activities thoroughly and adapt approaches accordingly. As a result, professional learning has a positive impact on important aspects of the school's work, in particular the quality of teaching.

Governors are very supportive of the school and provide suitably robust challenge to all leaders. They are proud members of the school community and carry out their duties diligently, making a positive contribution to the strategic direction of the school. They are committed to ensuring that the school promotes healthy eating and drinking appropriately.

The business manager, senior leaders and governors manage the school's finances well. Spending is planned responsibly and reviewed carefully. Leaders pay due regard to securing equity for those pupils experiencing disadvantage through effective use of the pupil development grant. This includes increased pastoral staffing to support individual pupils, providing school uniform and resources as required, and currently offering universal access to a free breakfast.

The school communicates effectively with parents sharing important information in a timely manner through, for example, weekly newsletters and online seminars, a careers' fair and a Curriculum for Wales information evening. This has contributed well to a productive and purposeful relationship with families.

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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