



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

**A report on**

**St Joseph's Catholic School and 6th Form Centre  
Newton Avenue  
Aberavon  
Port Talbot  
SA12 6EY**

**Date of inspection: October 2019**

**by**

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

## About St Joseph's Catholic School and 6th Form Centre

St Joseph's Catholic School and Sixth Form Centre is an English-medium, 11-18 school in Neath Port Talbot local authority. There are 868 pupils on roll including 209 in the sixth form, which is slightly higher than at the time of the last inspection in February 2013.

The school is situated on the Sandfields estate and serves the parishes of St Joseph's (Neath), Our Lady of Margam, Our Lady of the Assumption (Briton Ferry), St Joseph's (Port Talbot), St Therese's (Sandfields) and St Benedict's (Clydach). A small number of pupils come from outside the local authority, principally from the City and County of Swansea. The school's admission policy gives priority to Catholic children but accepts pupils from other faith backgrounds including those with no faith background.

Just over 25% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is above the national average of 16.4% for secondary schools in Wales. Most pupils speak English as their first language and a very few speak Welsh at home. Around 16% of pupils come from minority ethnic groups.

Twenty-four per cent of pupils have special educational needs, slightly higher than the average for Wales, which is 22.9%. In addition, 1.6% of pupils have statements of special educational needs compared with 2.2% for Wales as a whole.

The current headteacher was appointed in April 2012. The senior leadership team also includes one deputy headteacher, three assistant headteachers, the ALNCo and the business manager.

Until recently, the school was working with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward developments relating to education reform in Wales.

Estyn does not inspect religious education or the religious content of collective worship when it is a school with a religious character. Instead, the governing body is required by law to arrange for religious education and collective worship to be inspected separately.

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

St Joseph's Catholic School and Sixth Form Centre offers a caring and inclusive environment where most pupils feel safe and happy. Many pupils behave well and interact positively with each other and adults. A majority of pupils make sound progress, and engage well with their learning.

The school offers pupils a broad range of learning experiences, including many clubs and trips, and staff support pupils' wellbeing successfully. In a majority of lessons, teachers adapt the work effectively to meet the needs of pupils and ensure that they make appropriate progress. However, in a minority of lessons teachers do not plan carefully enough and their expectations of the quality and quantity of the work pupils produce are too low. Overall, provision for the progressive development of pupils' skills is underdeveloped.

Successful leadership has led to improvements in standards over recent years and effective provision for care, support and guidance. However, leaders have not given sufficient attention to improving the quality of teaching and learning, or the provision for skills.

| <b>Inspection area</b>                     | <b>Judgement</b>                      |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Standards</b>                           | <b>Adequate and needs improvement</b> |
| <b>Wellbeing and attitudes to learning</b> | <b>Adequate and needs improvement</b> |
| <b>Teaching and learning experiences</b>   | <b>Adequate and needs improvement</b> |
| <b>Care, support and guidance</b>          | <b>Good</b>                           |
| <b>Leadership and management</b>           | <b>Adequate and needs improvement</b> |

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Improve standards, particularly in terms of pupils' skills
- R2 Improve the quality of teaching and assessment
- R3 Improve the quality and impact of strategic leadership
- R4 Improve attendance
- R5 Ensure robust financial management
- R6 Respond to the wellbeing issues identified during the inspection

## **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 a majority of lessons, pupils engage well with their learning and make sound progress. In these lessons, pupils recall prior learning effectively and have a secure grasp of subject specific terminology. In a very few lessons, pupils make particularly strong progress. However, in a minority of lessons pupils have weak recall of prior learning and key terms, and do not make sufficient progress.

Many pupils are attentive in lessons and listen respectfully to their teachers and each other. Many are eager to answer questions and a minority give extended, well-reasoned answers such as when discussing the reasons for the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II in history lessons. A few pupils are particularly articulate and express their views maturely. However, a minority of pupils give short, underdeveloped responses or are reluctant to get involved in class discussions.

Many pupils have sound basic reading skills. They skim and scan texts competently and locate and extract information efficiently. A majority of pupils highlight texts appropriately but are less confident in annotating and analysing texts. A few pupils annotate and interrogate texts skilfully, such as when they analyse the features of gothic writing. A few pupils struggle to understand reading materials.

A majority of pupils write accurately and organise their work appropriately. When given appropriate opportunities, they produce suitable extended writing. However, overall, pupils do not practise their extended writing skills sufficiently across the curriculum or write for a wide enough range of purposes. A few pupils produce extended writing of high quality and their drafting and editing skills are well developed. They write with accuracy and precision, and employ a range of sentence types and stylistic features for effect. For example, in humanities they employ persuasive language effectively when they write fictional letters to governments about their strategies to address the issues surrounding the spread of AIDS. A majority of pupils do not re-draft or improve their work well enough and their ability to organise and structure their writing independently is too limited.

Many pupils are able to solve basic numerical problems well and have a sound understanding of simple proportions. These pupils are able to apply their numeracy skills to improve their understanding, such as when they use the relationship between circumference and diameter to deduce pi and solve problems when calculating the circumference of circles. However, a majority of pupils struggle to apply their numeracy skills to solve problems in a variety of contexts. A few pupils have a limited understanding of place value, how to plot graphs and how to explain their methods of solving mathematical problems.

Most pupils use their information and communication technology (ICT) skills competently to research and for word processing, presentations and basic spreadsheet work. They also make appropriate use of specific packages such as 2D and 3D design software in technology. However, in general, pupils do not develop their higher order ICT skills well enough across the curriculum.

In a few subjects, pupils develop their creative skills well. For example, they develop their performance skills effectively in music and when they improvise mimes in drama. A few pupils demonstrate originality and flair in their creative writing and in their perceptive understanding of poetry, such as when they explore the theme of escape in Keats' poetry. Many pupils engage enthusiastically in physical activity such as when they develop team tactics in a multi-skills game in physical education lessons.

A majority of pupils are developing their thinking skills appropriately, for example when they explain their thought processes for sequencing energy transfers in a food chain in science. However, in a minority of cases, pupils do not develop their thinking skills well enough because of the lack of opportunities offered to them. A few pupils struggle to explain or apply basic concepts.

Over the period 2016-2018, performance at key stage 4 fluctuated but generally pupils made suitable progress. During this time, the performance of girls compared well with that of girls in similar schools, but the performance of boys and pupils eligible for free school meals generally compared less favourably with those groups in similar schools. Over the same period, outcomes in Welsh were strong and a majority of pupils gained a level 2 qualification at the end of key stage 4. Nearly all pupils progress to education, employment or training on leaving school.

Over the three years from 2016-2018, the proportion of sixth form pupils gaining three A\*-C and three A\*-A grades at A level or equivalent generally compares well with levels in similar schools. Retention is also a positive feature, with the proportion of pupils who complete their courses and achieve at least three level 3 qualifications broadly in line with the national average. However, analysis of pupil grades shows that, overall, pupils do not make as much progress as pupils with similar levels of prior attainment.

### **Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Adequate and needs improvement**

Most pupils feel safe and enjoy coming to school. They know whom to approach if they need help and are aware of the need to stay safe online. Many pupils demonstrate respect for each other and are able to count on their friends for support when things go wrong. Most pupils are confident that the school deals well with the very few instances of bullying that are reported.

Many pupils have well-developed social skills and most are polite and welcoming to visitors. For example, they open doors and greet people positively on introduction.

Many pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. In lessons, they engage well, display positive attitudes and are ready to learn. However, a few pupils are distracted from their work too easily. These pupils exhibit poor behaviour that disrupts their own learning and that of others. In these cases, pupils are slow to focus and engage in the work set. As a result, they make insufficient progress.

The majority of pupils complete the work set and show suitable levels of determination. A few pupils explore new concepts and seek to deepen understanding and many sixth-form pupils demonstrate suitable resilience when tackling challenging tasks.

Many pupils understand the need for a healthy lifestyle and the importance of diet and exercise. They benefit from taking part in a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities and trips such as sports clubs and the 'News Room' journalism club. Participation rates in extra-curricular activities are high.

Many pupils in the sixth form develop their leadership skills appropriately, for example, as ethos ambassadors or when mentoring younger pupils and supporting them in lessons. A few pupils have begun to influence the provision for wellbeing. For example, representatives from Year 11 and Year 12 sit on a local mental health forum and have recently completed a survey of pupils' views. One outcome of the survey was the introduction of a 'time2talk' box for pupils to request support from peer mentors.

A few pupils in key stage 3 and 4 develop their leadership skills suitably, for example by becoming peer mentors and members of the school council. However, not all pupils are aware of the role of the school council and it does not influence whole-school decisions well enough. A few pupils have influenced teaching and learning, when, for example, they have been involved in the development of the schemes of work and teaching strategies for numeracy lessons. Overall, pupils' views do not have enough influence on school life.

Attendance rates improved in 2019 but have generally been below expectation over the previous four years.

### **Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement**

In most lessons, teachers nurture positive working relationships with pupils. In many lessons, teachers have sound subject knowledge and provide clear instructions. These teachers provide helpful resources that support pupils' learning well.

In a majority of lessons, teachers prepare engaging starter activities and tasks that stimulate pupils' curiosity. These teachers explain concepts effectively and provide examples that help pupils to understand what they should do and how best to approach tasks. They adapt their teaching beneficially to meet the needs of pupils of different abilities. They also provide effective support when circulating the classroom and through successful deployment of learning support assistants. In these lessons, the pace of learning is suitable and pupils make appropriate progress.

In the very few lessons where pupils make strong progress, teachers have a high level of subject knowledge. When planning lessons, these teachers consider carefully pupils' prior learning and have ambitious learning goals. Their lessons have clear aims and the purpose of the learning is understood well by pupils. Their delivery is engaging and creative, and captures pupils' interest and imagination well. These teachers have high expectations of pupils and focus appropriately on the quality of their work. They ask thought provoking questions and check pupils' understanding regularly, adapting their lessons where necessary.

In a minority of lessons, teachers do not plan carefully enough to ensure pupil progress. Their lessons lack clear aims and they do not adapt their teaching suitably to meet the needs of pupils of different abilities. These teachers do not provide enough challenge for pupils and their expectations of the quality and quantity of the

work pupils produce are too low. They give pupils too many low level tasks such as copying, or give them too much help. These teachers do not model approaches to tasks or provide pupils with beneficial examples to support their understanding. In these lessons, pupils do not make sufficient progress and the pace of learning is too slow.

A majority of teachers use questioning effectively to gauge pupils' understanding and knowledge. However, a minority of teachers do not do this well enough. Often, they rely too heavily on whole class questioning where only a very few pupils respond, which does not give them an accurate enough picture of all pupils' understanding. They do not give pupils enough time to engage meaningfully with questions or discussions and settle for brief, underdeveloped answers.

A majority of teachers provide helpful verbal and written feedback. Around half of teachers give pupils valuable follow up tasks that help them to improve their work, and check their responses suitably. However, in a minority of cases, teachers provide superficial comments. There is too much variation within and across departments in terms of the impact of assessment on improving pupils' work, and expectations of pupils' responses to feedback.

Overall, the school provides a balanced and relevant curriculum that builds appropriately on pupils' experiences. A programme for more able pupils provides valuable opportunities and support, which has led to improved outcomes and attainment. However, the school's curriculum arrangements do not allow pupils to progress in a very few subjects, for example in modern foreign languages at key stage 3 and in a few courses in key stage 4 and key stage 5, where corresponding options are not available.

At key stage 4, the school considers pupils' aspirations suitably when planning the curriculum and offers an appropriate range of academic and vocational courses. Most pupils are able to follow their desired pathways and access programmes that provide appropriate provision and valuable qualifications. The school has broadened its provision through arrangements with external partners, for example with the introduction of off-site courses for construction and hairdressing. They have also recently strengthened the alternative curriculum provision for vulnerable pupils and now provide relevant learning experiences as well as opportunities to gain formal qualifications.

There have been creative developments in a few areas of the curriculum. For example, a wellbeing course is taught through physical education in key stage 3, which has been effective in supporting pupils to become ethical, informed and confident. In humanities lessons, pupils study the historical, geographical and ethical implications of current issues such as Brexit and the humanitarian crisis in Syria.

The school provides positive opportunities for pupils to extend their learning outside the classroom. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer that enhance pupils' wellbeing, for example the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme, visits to local businesses and fieldwork on the Gower peninsula.

The school provides suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills and understanding of Welsh culture, such as the school Eisteddfod, trips to



Llangrannog and Welsh medium sports clubs. Overall, pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to develop and practise their Welsh language skills outside of Welsh lessons.

During the last year, the school has focused suitably on developing pupils' skills in oracy, numerical reasoning, Welsh and digital competence across the curriculum. However, this work has not resulted in comprehensive provision in these areas. The school does not have a coherent and co-ordinated approach to the progressive development of pupils' skills across the curriculum.

There is a range of appropriate interventions to support pupils with weak literacy skills. However, limited support exists to help pupils with weak numeracy skills. Many interventions are not evaluated robustly enough.

### **Care, support and guidance: Good**

The school has a supportive and inclusive ethos that successfully promotes the wellbeing of pupils. Staff provide a high level of sensitive support and care for pupils.

The school provides a wide range of useful strategies to support pupils' wellbeing. The 'Hwb' centre provides comprehensive support for pupils with a variety of additional learning and emotional needs. Pupils attending this provision benefit from a range of activities and options, including 'quiet' time, art and pet therapy, which help to develop their emotional and social skills. This also helps these pupils to feel secure, and they appreciate the opportunity to access the centre when they need support. This has a positive impact on their attendance and general wellbeing.

The school communicates well with parents through newsletters and social media. Staff also provide parents with useful information about their child's achievements and attendance through an online app. Annual reports keep parents well informed about their child's progress and their targets for improvement. However, in key stage 3, achievement targets and comments on individual pupils' attendance are not always ambitious enough or sufficiently motivating.

Arrangements for pupils' transition from their primary school are comprehensive and help them to settle quickly into the school. Pupils with special educational needs benefit from effective, enhanced support on their transition to secondary school.

Pupils receive appropriate advice when making their choices for key stage 4 options and in making decisions about the next stage in their education, training or employment. A few pupils undertake useful work experience, mainly through vocational programmes. In the sixth form, many pupils benefit from a well-established Seren Network for more able pupils and regular masterclasses from universities.

The school has suitable tracking systems to monitor the academic progress of pupils in all key stages. Teachers use information from this system appropriately to identify pupils who are at risk of underachievement. This is delivered through mentoring and learning support intervention. Pastoral leaders monitor attendance regularly and

there is a range of strategies to encourage good attendance. However, the tracking and recording of attendance across all year groups are inconsistent, and strategies to improve attendance have not been effective enough.

The school has effective procedures for dealing with the very few recorded incidents of bullying. A new 'Ready to Learn' policy is beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' attitudes and behaviour.

Individual education plans are comprehensive and worthwhile. They include useful strategies to help staff to meet the needs of pupils. Pupils with special educational needs are supported well through individual and small group interventions. The school monitors and supports the achievement of these pupils effectively, particularly at key stage 3.

The school offers valuable opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through assemblies and the 'Morning Care' registration programme. The personal and social education programme contributes well to pupils' understanding of topics such as personal relationships, sustainability and global issues. They receive useful guidance on a wide range of issues such as healthy living, keeping fit and online safety. In key stage 4, this is enhanced by a suitable life skills programme.

The school provides a comprehensive range of lunchtime and after school opportunities to encourage pupils to participate in the arts and in sport. These include sports clubs such as volleyball, dodgeball and table tennis, and others such as drama, maths, creative writing and chess and draughts. There are appropriate arrangements for encouraging healthy eating and drinking.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils generally meet requirements, although arrangements for recording the attendance of pupils who are off site during the school day require review.

### **Leadership and management: Adequate and needs improvement**

The headteacher and his senior leader team have offered supportive leadership to the school in a time of substantial uncertainty regarding its future. Overall, leadership has led to improvements in examination outcomes in key stage 4 since 2017, good behaviour among pupils and effective provision to support pupils' wellbeing. However, leaders have not set out clear enough expectations for high quality teaching and have not ensured enough progress in planning for pupils' literacy, numeracy or ICT skills.

In general, there is a suitable senior leadership structure. However, the range of responsibilities is not distributed evenly, which limits the overall impact of the senior leadership team. In general, staff have a sound understanding of the school's priorities for improvement. However, senior leaders have not been successful in communicating a vision for, or expectations around, high quality teaching and learning.

There is a suitable programme of line management meetings. Overall, these have been successful in holding staff to account and supporting improvements. In general, the majority of records of meetings focus suitably on important aspects such as behaviour and standards, particularly in terms of examination outcomes. They include useful action points that are followed-up. However, in a minority of cases, records focus overly on operational matters or merely serve to give information and do not generate actions.

The majority of middle leaders lead their areas of responsibility well. However, in a minority of cases, they do not carry out monitoring activities rigorously or frequently enough and do not set clear enough expectations for the quality of provision.

The governing body is well informed and extremely supportive of the school. Members offer suitable challenge as well as practical support.

Leaders carry out a suitable range of self-evaluation activities to support them to make improvements in standards and provision. They have a strong understanding of examination performance information. Middle leaders use detailed analyses of this information, including individual and class level data, to identify areas for development effectively. This helps them to make appropriate adjustments to provision or plan additional support as required.

During their lesson observations, leaders focus suitably on pupils' attitudes to learning, progress in lessons and oracy. These observations have informed whole school priorities for improvement appropriately. However, in general, leaders do not identify strengths or shortcomings in teaching well enough during their monitoring activities.

In general, departmental planning pays suitable attention to specific areas for development and contributes appropriately to whole school priorities. Actions for improvement identified by departments are not prioritised effectively. There are systematic arrangements for monitoring their progress, although in a minority of cases these are not applied rigorously enough. This weakens accountability and limits leaders' ability to evaluate the impact of their actions or make timely adjustments where necessary.

The school is beginning to develop a learning culture where staff are open to sharing their ideas and learn from their successes and failures. Through their use of the 'toolbox' sessions, staff work collaboratively to share and discuss their practice.

Senior leaders have delivered sound leadership training to the new heads of core subjects and this has enhanced their understanding of their role and their use of data in particular. The school works well with other schools within and outside the local authority to share ideas and learn from the experiences of others. It has established beneficial links with teacher training organisations. The school has also very recently set up four relevant working groups to focus on the school's priorities. However, these professional groups have not had enough impact on improving the quality of teaching or pupils' literacy skills.

There are appropriate arrangements for performance management. Objectives are generally aligned to the school's priorities and they are linked suitably to professional learning opportunities. However, the majority of performance management objectives are not precise enough to enable teachers to plan for or measure their improvement successfully.

Support members of staff are deployed effectively and are a valuable resource. In a very few instances, teachers are not deployed efficiently.

Since 2014, the school's finances have fluctuated and it has been able to record a budget surplus on two occasions since this time. The school is currently in deficit and has an agreed deficit reduction plan with the local authority. Overall, the school does not monitor budget costings rigorously enough.

Although the school's budget is very limited, it has continued to upgrade information and communication technology equipment and redecorated appropriately, although not all toilets are in good condition.

Overall, the school uses the pupil development grant suitably, and this funding is used to support pupils in important areas. However, this has not had a sustained enough impact on the attendance or outcomes of pupils eligible for free school meals.

## 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](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Excellent</b>                                   | Very strong, sustained performance and practice                          |
| <b>Good</b>  | Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement          |
| <b>Adequate and needs improvement</b>              | Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement |
| <b>Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement</b> | 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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