



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

A report on

**Islwyn High School
Waterloo
Blackwood
Oakdale
NP12 0NU**

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by

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

About Islwyn High School

Islwyn High School is an English-medium, mixed 11-16 comprehensive school situated in the town of Oakdale, near Blackwood. The school was opened in September 2016 following the amalgamation of Oakdale and Pontllanfraith Comprehensive Schools. The school serves a wide geographical area that includes both Pontllanfraith and Oakdale. The catchment area also extends east to Trinant, to Bryn in the west and south to Ynysddu, Cwmfelinfach and Wattsville. Islwyn High School works in partnership with three other schools and the local further education college to provide post 16 education for their pupils.

There are 1,154 pupils on roll, including 53 pupils in the secondary special resource base. Around 19% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This figure is above the Welsh average of 16.4% for secondary schools. Around 18% of pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas of Wales. Around 25% of pupils have additional learning needs, and just over 7% have a statement of special educational needs. Both of these figures are above the Welsh averages of 22.9% and 2.2% respectively.

Almost all pupils are from a white, British background. Very few speak English as an additional language. Very few pupils speak Welsh as a first language.

The current headteacher took up his post in 2016. The current leadership team includes two deputy headteachers, three assistant headteachers and the business manager.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website at the link below.
<http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/Schools/SchoolSearch?lang=en>

Summary

Over the last two years, senior leaders have successfully managed the challenging task of transferring the school from two separate sites into one new school building. This has been undertaken well ensuring minimal disruption to teaching and learning in the school. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school where innovative teaching and learning experiences challenge pupils to become happy, healthy and confident learners. However, the school has not maintained consistently high outcomes at key stage 4 and attendance requires improvement.

Most teachers develop positive working relationships with pupils and manage their behaviour well. This is having a beneficial impact on pupils' engagement in their learning. Many pupils make suitable progress in their learning. Overall, pupils make sound progress in developing their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.

In the secondary special resource base (SSRB) classes, teachers deliver highly effective lessons that engage and challenge pupils. These teachers adapt their teaching methods skilfully to meet the diverse needs of pupils. Many pupils in the SSRB make effective progress in lessons in line with their ability.

Overall, Islwyn High School has a supportive ethos that promotes the wellbeing of pupils appropriately. Many pupils feel safe in school and demonstrate positive behaviour in lessons. Most pupils are respectful towards one another and to visitors. This contributes to a calm environment across the school.

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

Recommendations

R1 Raise standards, particularly at key stage 4

R2 Improve attendance

R3 Address the safeguarding concerns identified during the inspection

R4 Improve the quality of self-evaluation and improvement planning

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

Many pupils make suitable progress in their learning. In the majority of lessons pupils show sound recall of prior learning and apply that knowledge and understanding appropriately in different situations. In a minority of lessons, pupils make strong progress and acquire a secure understanding of new concepts, for example, in history when considering the impact of the 'Great Depression' on society. In these lessons, a minority of pupils work well independently and take responsibility for their own learning. A very few pupils, however, make little progress in lessons.

Most pupils listen attentively and respectfully to their teachers and to one another. Many respond well to teachers' questioning and contribute appropriately in pair and group discussions. A few pupils offer extended responses and contribute their ideas thoughtfully and clearly. They use subject specific vocabulary confidently, for example when discussing tsunamis in geography. However, a minority offer only short, underdeveloped verbal responses in response to teachers' questions.

Many pupils have sound basic reading skills which they employ effectively to locate and extract relevant information from a range of texts. For example, in science, pupils use key information to improve a set of instructions for an experiment. A minority of pupils have strong reading skills and draw important information from a range of sources, for example, in history pupils evaluate sources to gain an insight into how Hitler rose to power in Germany. A few pupils show suitably strong inference skills, for example, in English when analysing the effective use of language in *The Handmaid's Tale*. However, a minority of pupils have underdeveloped reading skills. This prevents them from being able to synthesise ideas effectively and restricts their progress.

The majority of pupils write competently for an appropriate range of purposes in a minority of subjects across the curriculum. They write at length, connect ideas well and express themselves clearly. Many pupils present their work well. A few pupils produce writing that engages and interests the reader effectively. In history, for example, pupils write with a good sense of audience when writing persuasively about the effects of the Great Depression. Pupils' writing is generally accurate, however, a minority of pupils do not structure their ideas well enough and make too many basic errors in their spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Overall, many pupils have sound basic number skills which they apply accurately in appropriate contexts across the curriculum. In a few subjects, pupils interpret and analyse data successfully, for example, in Welsh when discussing health and fitness statistics. Overall, however, pupils do not apply their numeracy skills well enough in subjects other than mathematics.

Pupils develop their information and communication technology (ICT) skills well in ICT lessons. A minority of pupils demonstrate strong digital skills outside of ICT lessons in a very few subjects. For example, pupils use ICT competently to assist with the manufacture of design ideas. However, in most cases, the majority of pupils use these skills at too basic a level.

Many pupils apply their creative skills appropriately in a range of subjects to solve problems and to think flexibly. For example, in food technology, pupils work in groups to create and present dishes using a limited number of ingredients.

The majority of pupils make suitable progress in developing their Welsh language skills. Most pupils are entered for the GCSE Welsh second language full course qualification. In lessons, the majority of pupils use the language appropriately in familiar contexts, however, a minority lack confidence when expressing themselves verbally. A minority of more able pupils produce well considered pieces of writing, for example, using extended sentences to compare themselves with others.

Many pupils in the secondary special resource base make effective progress in lessons against their learning targets. Most listen well and make valuable contributions in group discussions. The majority of these pupils write simple sentences and short paragraphs to communicate successfully their response to a visual text. Most pupils demonstrate an appropriate understanding of number, for example when calculating distance using an online map. Many pupils use technology confidently to produce simple computer programmes.

In 2017 performance in the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics was below that in similar schools. Similarly, performance in the capped points score, the indicator which includes a wide range of subjects, was also below that in similar schools and below modelled outcomes. Provisional data for 2018 indicates that the school has made good progress in improving outcomes for both key performance indicators, however, performance remains below that of similar schools.

The proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades at A*-A was below the average for similar schools in 2017. Unverified data for 2018 indicate that outcomes for this indicator have remained the same.

In general, boys do not perform as well as girls and in 2017 the performance of both groups was significantly below the average for boys and girls in many key indicators in similar schools.

In 2017 the performance of pupils eligible for free school meals was below that of these pupils in similar schools in many key indicators.

Pupils with additional learning needs make good progress against their targets and many achieve well by the end of key stage 4.

At the end of Year 11, most pupils remain in education, employment or training.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Adequate and needs improvement

Most pupils are respectful towards one another and to staff and visitors to the school. These positive relationships underpin the inclusive, supportive ethos of the school. Many pupils are punctual and demonstrate positive behaviour in lessons. They behave well during lunchtime and break-time and this contributes to a calm environment across the school. The school council is contributing beneficially in the development of the school behaviour policy. However, the number of fixed term

exclusions is high and increased significantly during last year. Attendance has been below that of similar schools for the past two years. This has had a negative impact on the performance and progress of boys and pupils eligible for free school meals in particular.

The majority of pupils develop their understanding of how healthy eating and drinking can impact positively on their health in a range of worthwhile experiences. For example, in Welsh lessons, pupils discuss healthy food portions confidently. Many pupils benefit from the opportunity to participate in a variety of beneficial opportunities to exercise in school. Many pupils participate in an increasing range of suitable extra-curricular activities, for example, the recent school production of 'Beauty and the Beast' and a broad choice of 5x60 sports activities, including football for both boys and girls. Many pupils in the secondary special resource base show a strong awareness of the importance of healthy eating and living. They engage enthusiastically in a range of physical activity including outdoor adventure learning, sailing and disability gymnastics and rugby.

A minority of pupils are keen to participate in opportunities to develop leadership skills and take on beneficial leadership roles, for example as senior prefects, form representatives, rugby leaders and football referees.

Many pupils demonstrate understanding and respect for people from different beliefs, backgrounds and traditions. For example, in religious education pupils discuss thoughtfully the importance of tolerance and develop their understanding and appreciation of different ways of life.

Many pupils demonstrate enthusiasm, tenacity and commitment to their learning. They engage well in lessons, and are able to sustain concentration. For example, in food technology, pupils use their problem solving skills to manipulate ingredients in order to decorate a cake creatively. Many pupils work well with their peers.

Many pupils in the SSRB have positive attitudes to learning. They demonstrate joy and curiosity when exploring new tasks or experiences. For example, key stage 3 pupils take great delight in using descriptive language to describe textures and senses.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

Most teachers develop positive working relationships with pupils and manage their behaviour well. This is having a beneficial impact on pupils' engagement in their learning. Most teachers display strong subject knowledge and many provide effective language models for the pupils. Many teachers plan lessons skilfully. They reinforce pupils' prior learning and develop their knowledge, skills and understanding well. Overall, these lessons ensure a suitable pace to the learning.

In a few lessons, teaching has outstanding features. In these lessons, teaching is inspirational, teachers are creative and have very high expectations of pupils. For example in history, teachers provide valuable opportunities for problem solving and

nearly all Year 7 pupils contribute well to solving a Black Death crime scene investigation. In Welsh Bacalaureate lessons, teachers provide interesting opportunities for pupils to work in groups to raise awareness about the issue of child poverty. As a result, pupils persevere well and make outstanding progress.

A few teachers do not provide learning experiences that are sufficiently challenging for pupils. In these instances, teachers do not plan well enough for the progressive development of pupils' skills. In a few lessons the teaching does not meet the needs of all learners and the pace of learning is too slow.

Most teachers check regularly on pupils' progress during lessons and offer helpful verbal feedback. A minority of teachers use thought-provoking questions that prompt pupils to think deeply. For example, pupils in the secondary special resource base are asked to think carefully about the importance of truthfulness.

The majority of teachers provide useful written feedback advising pupils on how they can improve their work. The majority of pupils respond suitably and refine their work. However, teachers' use of marking codes is too variable. In many lessons, teachers ask pupils to assess work of their peers. The quality of this feedback is unclear on too many occasions and as a result, pupils do not know what they need to do to improve their work.

In the secondary special resource base classes, teachers deliver highly effective lessons that engage and challenge pupils. These teachers adapt their teaching methods skilfully to meet the diverse needs of pupils.

In key stage 3, the curriculum builds suitably on pupils' prior learning. Recently the school has introduced a greater focus on the development of literacy, numeracy and wider skills. This is beginning to have a positive impact on the progress made by pupils in lessons.

The worthwhile 'Challenge Champions' programme in key stage 3 helps pupils develop their wider skills in areas such as problem solving, critical thinking and creativity. Weekly sessions delivered during registration periods provide worthwhile challenges for pupils. For example, pupils draw on their creative, innovative and planning skills to design a model roller coaster.

At key stage 4, pupils choose from a suitable range of options. The school ensures that the choice of subjects available is appropriate for the needs of each cohort. For example, this year, pupils in Year 10 are able to follow a useful vocational home cooking skills course based around healthy eating. Although the school has a few links with external providers, the quality of off-site provision for pupils at risk of disengagement from school is not sufficiently developed.

In key stage 4, the school's provision for the 'Skills Challenge Certificate' provides pupils with valuable opportunities to develop a broad range of skills including personal effectiveness and problem solving. A range of well-planned projects enable pupils to apply and practise their wider social, employability and creative skills.

These projects include developing worthwhile social action campaigns or community projects, such as with a local gymnastics group or with activity groups for the disabled.

The school provides suitable opportunities for pupils to engage in beneficial work-focused education. Working with local and national organisations, pupils gain an insight into how to establish their own business, skills in running their own enterprise initiatives and opportunities to speak at a national event at the Senedd. The school makes appropriate curricular provision for pupils who are more able and talented. In a few cases, these opportunities are particularly valuable. For example, pupils take part in courses provided by universities to help them develop research skills.

The personal and social education curriculum contributes suitably to the provision of curriculum opportunities that enhance and extend pupils' experiences. This includes involvement in useful information events with banks to find out about mortgages and managing finances and useful visits to local heritage sites.

The curriculum in the secondary special resource base provides rich and extensive experiences for pupils. Pupils have valuable opportunities to access subjects and broader experiences that help them develop their literacy, numeracy, personal and social skills. These include a lively and engaging community week that gives pupils access to subject specialist facilities in the high school and opportunities to engage in sporting, creative and social activities. The curriculum is carefully planned to ensure that the wide range of needs of pupils are very well met. As a result, pupils benefit considerably from the exceptional experiences they have in the resource base.

The school has strong arrangements for enhancing the provision of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills across the curriculum. A dedicated team of co-ordinators, working closely with targeted departments, have developed valuable training and resources to help teachers to improve their classroom practice. All co-ordinators are involved in department reviews and provide helpful specialist advice on how to enhance provision further in subject areas. There are regular opportunities to share good practice in the teaching of skills. National test data is used well to identify general areas for development and individual support needs.

Literacy and numeracy co-ordinators have begun working closely with partner primary schools to develop common approaches to teaching and secure progress in skills. There are a wide range of form time activities and intervention programmes that are tailored carefully to individual needs for pupils who require additional support. In particular, a literacy intervention has had a significant impact on pupils' standards in a short space of time. A few teachers who are involved with this intervention are beginning to incorporate these helpful approaches in beneficial ways in their subject lessons. However, it is too soon to judge the impact of this provision on the progressive development of pupils' skills across the curriculum.

Provision for the development of pupils' Welsh language skills is strong. Most pupils are entered for the GCSE Welsh second language full course at the end of key stage 4. The school makes enhanced provision for a very few pupils who join the school

with fluent Welsh language skills. The school provides pupils with appropriate opportunities to develop their appreciation of Welsh heritage and culture, for example through celebrating Diwrnod Shwmae and organising an annual Eisteddfod and residential visits to Llangrannog.

Care, support and guidance: Adequate and needs improvement

Overall, Islwyn High School has a supportive ethos that promotes the wellbeing of pupils appropriately. Pupils' spiritual and moral development is addressed through effective assemblies and tutor time on topics such as respect for all ages on the International Day of Older Persons.

The school has developed a useful tracking system to monitor the progress made by different groups of pupils. This provides senior leaders with a valuable oversight of school performance in key indicators throughout the year. Leaders at all levels have made effective use of tracking data to address underperformance which has contributed effectively to improved outcomes in most key performance indicators at key stage 4.

The school has recently introduced a well-considered behaviour management policy. While exclusions rates were high in 2017 to 2018, this new approach is contributing suitably to reducing the recorded instances of misbehaviour and bullying. Pupils with social or behavioural needs are supported by a suitable range of strategies and interventions, for example autistic pupils within mainstream access nurture areas during break and lunchtime. However, behaviour is not sufficiently well-managed in the canteen.

The school has recently extended its range of interventions to improve attendance, for example pastoral leaders now engage frequently with parents and carers of pupils with high levels of absenteeism. This is beginning to have a suitable impact on attendance.

The school provides a wide range of activities to develop pupils' social and creative skills. These include a school orchestra, well-attended choir and valuable school production. There are a wide range of opportunities for pupils to take regular exercise through the many sporting clubs, which include basketball, rugby and fitness sessions.

The SSRB provides exceptional learning and personal support for pupils. For example, the SSRB provides a wide range of worthwhile opportunities for these pupils to practise basic literacy, communication and numeracy skills during carefully planned outings in the local community. Pupils within the SSRB who are able to progress to post 16 education are given valuable advice on opportunities available in partner schools and colleges.

Pupils with additional learning needs within mainstream also receive valuable and well-co-ordinated support, for example through worthwhile small group literacy and numeracy interventions. Learning coaches provide beneficial support for pupils at

key stage 4. The annual review process for pupils with special educational needs meets statutory requirements. However, the targets and strategies identified in individual education plans are not always precise or clear enough to help support pupils to make strong progress.

The school provides all pupils with helpful options advice, for example through valuable one-to-one interviews to discuss future career plans. Reports to parents are suitable and many contain useful general comments on areas for improvement.

The school collaborates effectively with outside agencies to address the needs of vulnerable pupils, for example through carefully planned support for vulnerable families.

There is a broad range of opportunities for pupils to share their views, for example as part of the departmental review process. Pupils, including the most vulnerable, can develop their leadership skills through the prefect system, as sports' leaders, by being "buddies" to younger pupils and through involvement in the school council. The school council makes a valuable contribution to school policies, such as the new behaviour policy. However, the actions of the school council are not always communicated effectively enough across the school.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding is a cause for concern. The school procedures for keeping pupils safe from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism, are not sufficiently robust.

Leadership and management: Adequate and needs improvement

The headteacher provides robust leadership and is ably supported by the senior leadership team. He has a clear vision for the school where innovative teaching and learning experiences challenge pupils to become happy, healthy and confident learners. This vision is shared well with staff, members of the governing body and pupils. However, leadership has had insufficient impact on important aspects of the school's work to date, in particular outcomes for pupils at the end of key stage 4 and attendance.

Senior leaders are proficient in addressing significant challenges. For example, over the last two years, they have successfully managed the challenging task of transferring the school from two separate sites into one new school building. This has been undertaken well ensuring minimal disruption to teaching and learning in the school.

Senior leaders are beginning to develop and implement useful systems to help middle leaders drive forward improvements in their areas of responsibility. For example, the appointment of senior middle leaders has strengthened leadership capacity to influence whole-school initiatives, such as provision for the development of pupils' skills.

Governors are supportive of the school and have a satisfactory understanding of the challenges facing the school. They have established useful committees, for example

to focus on standards or wellbeing. The school is developing suitably the role of the link governors. However, it is too early for these initiatives to have had a substantial impact on practice.

Senior leaders have a realistic view of many aspects of the school's work. They have established a culture of openness which is balanced with appropriate accountability measures.

The school has a clear plan and calendar for self-evaluation processes. These include procedures for gathering first-hand evidence of teaching and learning from a wide range of sources. In a few instances, systems for gathering information do not focus well enough on the quality of standards or provision. For example, lesson observations do not consider pupils' progress sufficiently as a measure of effective teaching and the scrutiny of pupils' work places too much emphasis on systems and procedures at the expense of the quality of assessment.

Middle leaders evaluate the work of their areas of responsibility using a common and methodical approach. While this has achieved consistency of approach across the school, there remains too much variability in the quality of this evaluation. Furthermore, the evaluation framework is overly complex and not helpful in guiding middle leaders to make clear and precise enough judgements about the quality of standards and the effectiveness of teaching in their departments. As a result, middle leaders do not identify areas for improvement explicitly enough.

Whole-school development planning is based on appropriate areas for development. However, objectives are not clear and specific enough, and the school has not identified sufficiently well, the criteria for success.

Overall, professional learning is having a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching across the school. Teachers benefit from engagement in a suitable range of professional learning opportunities. Sharing good practice in teaching is becoming an important aspect of school life. The learning and teaching newsletter provides a valuable platform to share successes and ideas about teaching. Middle leaders have undertaken useful training and development on a range of themes that support their work well.

There are appropriately robust arrangements for performance management. These include the identification of supportive professional learning to help teachers to achieve their objectives.

The school manages its financial resources well. It has suitable plans for budgetary monitoring and expenditure. Governors have a sound understanding of the budget and question the school's spending appropriately. Overall, the school uses the pupil development grant suitably. However, this has not had sufficient impact on outcomes for pupils eligible for free school meals during the last two years.

The school uses its indoor and outdoor environment appropriately. For example, science labs are well equipped and outdoor space includes an all-weather sports pitch and an athletics track. However, the canteen area experiences some overcrowding during break times and lunchtimes.

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

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

Excellent	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
Adequate and needs improvement	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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