



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

**A report on**

**Crickhowell High School  
New Road  
Crickhowell  
Powys  
NP8 1AW**

**Date of inspection: April 2018**

**by**

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

## About Crickhowell High School

Crickhowell High School is an English-medium 11-18 school maintained by Powys local authority. Pupils come from the town of Crickhowell, the surrounding villages and the rural community. A significant number choose to come across the border from Monmouthshire and Blaenau Gwent.

There are currently 882 pupils on roll, including 193 in the sixth form. Around 7.1% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is well below the Welsh average of 17% for secondary schools. Around 2% of pupils live in the 20% most deprived areas in Wales.

Around 18% of pupils have a special educational need. Of these around 1% have statements of special educational needs. Both are lower than the average figures for Wales as a whole, which are 21.5% and 2% respectively.

Around 96% of pupils are from a white, British background. A very small proportion of pupils are learning English as an additional language. A very few pupils are fluent Welsh speakers.

The headteacher has been in post since 2010. The leadership team consists of the headteacher, two deputy headteachers, and one assistant headteacher.

The school was last inspected in September 2012.

The school is currently a pioneer school and is working with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward developments relating to the curriculum and professional learning.

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

Crickhowell High School has a culture of high ambition that every pupil should achieve 'excellence through endeavour'. The school makes sure that pupils are supported to achieve through the highly effective care, support and guidance it provides. This has substantially positive benefits on the behaviour, wellbeing and attitudes of its pupils. Senior leaders and governors have been successful in ensuring that the school's values and priorities are well understood by staff and pupils. They know the school's strengths and areas for development well and have clear plans in place to make further improvements.

<b>Inspection area</b>	<b>Judgement</b>
<b>Standards</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Wellbeing and attitudes to learning</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Teaching and learning experiences</b>	<b>Good</b>
<b>Care, support and guidance</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>Good</b>

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Reduce the variation in the quality of teaching and assessment, including in relation to the provision for literacy
- R2 Improve outcomes for the most able pupils
- R3 Improve the quality and consistency of middle leadership
- R4 Work to eliminate the deficit budget

## **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 a case study on its work in relation to its work in support of pupil mental health and wellbeing, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

## Main findings

### Standards: Good

In lessons and over time, pupils' standards and progress are strong in many areas of the curriculum. Over the last four years pupils have made more progress than expected in a majority of indicators at the end of key stage 4.

Many pupils develop their knowledge, skills and understanding well in most areas of the curriculum. They apply these successfully to their current work. In a few cases they do this particularly well. For example, in art, pupils draw on their personal experience, knowledge of different types of media, the work of artists and understanding of the assessment criteria to decide what and how to present creative pieces of a high standard.

Most pupils have good listening skills. They listen respectfully to their teachers and to their peers. Many pupils are happy to share their ideas and opinions on topics under discussion and to provide brief verbal responses to teachers' questions. When given the opportunity to do so, pupils provide more thoughtful and developed verbal responses. For example, they speak knowledgeably and articulately on conventions of theatre after looking at video clips from 'Hamlet' and 'The Duchess of Malfi'. Most sixth form pupils demonstrate very well-developed thinking and verbal skills, for example when discussing philosophers and religious figures in religious studies.

Many pupils use an appropriate range of reading strategies to support their learning. This includes reading for information, for example in physical information when researching the properties of proteins. A majority of pupils have a sound grasp of inference and deduction, particularly when discussing themes and characters in literary texts. Examples include English lessons where pupils discuss well how Golding presents civilisation and savagery in 'Lord of the Flies'. A few pupils demonstrate a developing sense of symbolism in literary texts. A few more able pupils read poetry with a sophisticated degree of understanding and appreciation, such as when discussing how nature is presented in Brian Patten's 'The River's Story'.

Many pupils produce writing that is mostly technically secure and appropriately organised. A majority of pupils write suitably for an appropriate range of purposes and audiences. Pupils are mostly secure with regard to the purpose of their writing, for example when writing expository pieces about tattoos or opinion pieces on the media's portrayal of Muslims. However, a minority are not always clear in their sense of audience. As a consequence, they make incorrect language choices and their writing lacks the correct tone. A minority of pupils do not proof-read or edit their work well enough, which results in basic errors being perpetuated. These shortcomings result in work that is not of the standard of which pupils are capable.

In mathematics lessons and in other subjects when appropriate, most pupils demonstrate very good numeracy skills. They have a firm grasp of the main number skills, including percentages. Most pupils draw graphs accurately and can choose correctly the most appropriate type of graph for a situation. Many pupils are able to analyse graphical information, explain the main features, and use this information to

draw conclusions. They have effective data handling skills. Many pupils have a firm grasp of measurement skills. For example, in Year 9 design technology, pupils work on a project to re-design the community library. In this activity, rooted in a real life context, they use rulers, tape measures and electronic laser measuring devices to create scale drawings. Many pupils are able correctly to substitute and re-arrange formulae to calculate missing values, for example when calculating velocity, distance, time and acceleration using the equations of motion.

Most pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) confidently to research, create and communicate ideas, using word processing, presentation software and the internet. However, their use of more advanced applications such as spreadsheets and databases to find and analyse information is underdeveloped.

The majority of pupils make suitable progress in developing their Welsh language skills in Welsh lessons. The use of Welsh by pupils outside of lessons is limited. In 2017, only a minority of pupils were entered for a full course GCSE qualification in Welsh second language. Of these nearly all achieved a level 2 pass. The other pupils were entered for the short course but only a minority achieved at level 2.

Performance in the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics has been strong over the past four years and consistently above that in similar schools. Performance in the capped points score has improved slightly over the past four years. In 2017, performance in this indicator, which includes a wide range of subjects, is just above the average for similar schools for the first time in four years.

The proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSEs or equivalent at grades at A\*-A has fluctuated considerably over the past four years. However, performance in this indicator has been consistently below the average for similar schools in recent years.

Over the past three years, the performance of boys and girls has been above that of boys and girls in similar schools in many indicators.

Pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) make very good progress and many achieve well by the end of key stage 4.

Nearly all sixth form pupils make very strong progress in lessons. They are confident and articulate and enthusiastic learners. In 2017 performance in the indicator that includes three A level grades or equivalent at A\*-A is very strong and is above similar schools in two of the last three years. Over the past three years the school's performance in other post 16 indicators has been around that in similar schools.

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

### **Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Excellent**

Most pupils across the school are enthusiastic to learn and want to achieve their full potential. They settle very quickly in lessons, demonstrate high levels of perseverance in their learning and tackle challenging tasks with determination. Most pupils listen respectfully to one another and demonstrate self-control as they share their thoughts and ideas clearly and coherently in a co-operative manner. Collaborative working is a strength of the school. As are the exemplary attitudes towards learning and the strong contribution to school life demonstrated by pupils in the sixth form.

Behaviour in nearly all lessons is very good. Nearly all pupils behave exceptionally well in corridors while moving between lessons and during whole-school assemblies. Pupils are extremely polite and courteous to others. Nearly all pupils feel safe in school. There is extensive mutual trust and respect between pupils and staff. Strong relationships enable pupils to approach a wide range of staff confidently, especially members of the wellbeing team should they need support. As a result, as pupils progress through the school, they grow in maturity and confidence.

Most pupils have a very valuable understanding of healthy lifestyles. High participation rates in physical education lessons ensure that most pupils undertake regular exercise. Participation rates in the lunchtime and extensive extra-curricular programmes, which include a wide range of cultural, sporting and academic activities, are very high and enrich the experiences of pupils. Through these activities, pupils develop their social, leadership and life skills effectively. For example, each department has subject-student ambassadors that help to run departmental extra-curricular activities skilfully.

The pupil voice platforms, which include the Student Senedd, Eco Council and Sports Council, are very effective. They engage regularly in meaningful discussions and feed back their ideas and progress to all pupils. Through these groups, pupils are able to voice their opinions on important aspects of school life and local issues positively. For example, these groups have provided valuable suggestions on physical health provision and services within the local authority.

Pupils have a very strong appreciation of their role as global citizens. Their experiences are enriched by useful links with China, South Africa, Uganda and Europe. Through these links and the associated cultural exchange visits, many pupils have a very clear understanding and appreciation of how people from different backgrounds, faiths and religions live.

### **Teaching and learning experiences: Good**

Most teachers have good subject knowledge and foster productive working relationships with nearly all pupils.

In many lessons, teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning. They establish useful classroom routines that make sure pupils settle quickly and are ready to learn. They give clear, helpful instructions and provide good language models, supporting pupils' understanding of key subject terminology well. In many lessons, teachers explain concepts clearly and prepare activities and resources that engage pupils successfully. A particular strength of these lessons is teachers' close monitoring of pupil progress and the helpful verbal feedback they provide.

The majority of teachers provide pupils with a suitable level of challenge and pace to their learning. This helps most pupils to make secure progress. A few teachers plan lessons that inspire pupils. They use their subject knowledge expertly to extend pupils' understanding and maximise the progress they make. In a minority of lessons, teachers question pupils skilfully. They probe pupils' understanding successfully and challenge them to develop their verbal responses well.

In a few instances, teachers do not have sufficiently high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They do not plan activities that are matched well enough to pupils' needs and abilities. In a very few lessons, the pace of learning is inappropriate. In these lessons teachers talk for too long and do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to develop their independent learning.

Many teachers use "milestone marking" sheets effectively to ensure that pupils understand the broad areas that they need to improve. However, in general, teachers' written feedback is not precise enough and does not provide pupils with sufficiently clear guidance on how to improve their work. Across subjects, the assessment of literacy, particularly pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar, is underdeveloped.

The quality of teaching is good.

The school has a clear rationale for its curriculum, based on offering pupils beneficial opportunities to develop their literacy, numeracy and subject specific skills alongside a strong focus on their personal development.

The school's departmental links with feeder primary schools ensure that the curriculum builds effectively on pupils' experiences from key stage 2. Both in the sixth form and at key stage 4, the school offers a wide range of subjects that meet the interests and needs of all learners. This leads to nearly all pupils gaining employment or continuing with their education or training.

The school provides a comprehensive programme of curriculum enhancement experiences such as the 'robotics club', the wide range of popular sports clubs and educational visits within the local areas and overseas. This has a significantly positive impact on pupils' motivation to succeed and engagement in school life.

Provision for numeracy is strong. There is a wide range of worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in different subjects. For example, in science, pupils develop their calculation, data handling and graphical skills when investigating the effect of varying the concentration of salt solutions on the mass of immersed potato tissue. There is an appropriate range of opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy skills across the curriculum. However, the provision for the progressive development of pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum is too variable. The school provides carefully planned provision for pupils who require support with basic literacy and numeracy skills. This enables them to make strong progress in developing their skills. Outside of information technology lessons, pupils have appropriate opportunities to develop their presentation, communication and word processing skills. However, opportunities for pupils to develop their advanced ICT skills are underdeveloped.

The school offers a variety of suitable opportunities for them to develop their understanding of Welsh culture and the benefits of bilingualism, such as annual visits to Glan Llyn and competing in the Urdd Eisteddfod. Provision for a very few pupils that are fluent Welsh speakers does not build upon their prior experience of the language in primary school.



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

The school is successful in creating a culture of high ambition that every pupil should achieve 'excellence through endeavour'. The strong commitment of all staff to pupils' wellbeing supports well the culture of expectation and respect for others that pervades the school's work. This has a very positive impact on pupils' wellbeing and personal development.

The school has a comprehensive tracking system to record and monitor the progress and wellbeing of both individual and groups of pupils. This enables the school to address promptly any concerns or underachievement, and contributes very well to high levels of attendance and exemplary behaviour. Targeted support for pupils with emotional and social needs, including reducing anxiety and raising self-esteem, has a very positive impact on their attitudes to learning. The school's 'Canolfan Llwyddiant' ('Success Centre') and its 'Behaviour for Learning Centre' support well pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. They provide valuable and highly effective environments within which to address issues and help pupils to continue their learning.

The strong support and care provided by a highly committed and effective pastoral team enable most pupils to feel valued and to progress well in their learning. The school works very effectively with outside agencies, including the community police officer, mental health services and bereavement services.

The school provides highly successful provision for pupils with additional learning needs. It provides very effective, personalised support for these pupils in lessons and through well-targeted interventions. A clear and effective referral process ensures that there is a strong connection between additional learning needs provision and pastoral support. This ensures that the school is highly responsive to the changing needs of pupils with additional learning needs. This contributes significantly to the effective progression of these pupils to further education, employment or training.

The carefully planned personal and social education programme is very effective in supporting pupils' wellbeing and in developing their personal and social skills. Pupils learn to respect the values and beliefs of others and many develop suitably high levels of self-confidence. The school makes a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral and social development, through assemblies, the personal and social education programme, and work with the wider community.

The school encourages successfully pupils' involvement in the life of the school including through the School Senedd and Sports Council, and by acting as mentors or sports coaches for younger pupils. There are additional opportunities for pupils to develop their skills through charity work in the wider community and internationally, for example through a long established link with a school in Uganda. The school also makes suitable provision for pupils' cultural development through an extensive range of extra-curricular activities, including skills based clubs, community work and trips to local venues of historical and cultural significance.

Of particular strength to the school are the opportunities provided to help pupils make healthy lifestyle choices, including the introduction of 'mindfulness' and targeted

examination 'stress busting' sessions. Many pupils take advantage of the extensive opportunities provided to take regular physical exercise through the wide range of extra-curricular sporting activities, and particularly the Duke of Edinburgh programme. The school has appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

Arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

### **Leadership and management: Good**

The headteacher and leadership team have a clear vision for the strong and sustained improvement of the school. This is to achieve "Excellence through Endeavour" and this is communicated effectively and regularly throughout the school, for example in team meetings at all levels.

Leadership at all levels has brought about clear improvements in the quality of care, support and guidance and this has contributed to very high standards of pupil wellbeing. Leadership has also impacted positively on standards achieved by pupils in most key performance indicators at the end of key stage 4 and the sixth form during recent years. However, it has not had enough impact in other aspects of the school's work such as standards and teaching in a few areas of the curriculum and the performance of more able pupils in key stage 4.

Leaders set ambitious targets for the school and effective line management arrangements enable school leaders to monitor progress against targets regularly. Performance management arrangements are suitable and focus appropriately on pupil progress and improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Many middle leaders carry out their roles effectively and work well with senior leaders, for example in analysing pupil performance and identifying areas for improvement. However, inconsistencies remain in the work of a few middle leaders, for example in improving aspects of teaching and assessment.

Members of the governing body have a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They play a prominent role in setting the strategic direction of the school and provide a beneficial level of support for the school. Governors continue to challenge the school in order to improve a few areas of underperformance.

The school provides an extensive range of professional learning opportunities linked to the school's improvement priorities and staff performance management objectives. The school has planned effectively to support its staff in improving teaching and learning through the work of the professional learning teams. The school is also strongly committed to collaborative working. Many members of staff work regionally and nationally with a focus on sharing effective school improvement strategies. This has been beneficial in improving the school's own provision, as well as supporting the work of other schools. For example, the school's involvement in a national mental health support programme contributes well to the outstanding care, support and guidance provision.

Self-evaluation processes are comprehensive and well planned. The self-evaluation report is generally evaluative and identifies strengths and areas for improvement across most aspects of the school. School leaders take account of a wide range of first hand evidence to ensure that judgements are secure.

Improvement plans are strongly linked to the issues identified through self-evaluation and local and national priorities. Middle leaders have a secure understanding of their roles and many contribute purposefully to secure improvements in many areas. However, a few of the activities linked to self-evaluation are not rigorous enough to lead to sustained school improvement. For example, a few records of lesson observations do not focus well enough on the impact of teaching, in particular the progress that pupils make and the standards of their skills.

Planning for improvement has led to strengths in wellbeing and performance. However, there are a few considerations that require attention. These include improving the quality of teaching, in particular to challenge more able pupils, and the impact of assessment.

There is a comprehensive plan in place to manage and reduce a significant budget deficit.

The school uses its Pupil Development Grant to fund a range of effective strategies to address the impact of poverty on achievement.

## 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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Publication date: 27/06/2018