

A report on

Caerleon Comprehensive School

**Cold Bath Road
Caerleon
NP18 1NF**

Date of inspection: February 2025

by

Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education

and Training in Wales

About Caerleon Comprehensive School

Name of provider	Caerleon Comprehensive School
Local authority	Newport City Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	1468
Pupils of statutory school age	1212
Number in sixth form	256
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 21.1%)	10.8%
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 11.2%)	5.5%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.8%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	9.5%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/11/2022
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	31/10/2016
Start date of inspection	17/02/2025

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.

Summary

Caerleon Comprehensive School strives to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met, and they are prepared well for life. The school's motto 'Maximising Potential' is underpinned by largely effective teaching and a curriculum that allows pupils of all abilities to follow their chosen pathway. There are valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy skills across the curriculum, though the opportunities for them to develop their numeracy and Welsh language skills are limited.

The school has developed a strong culture of safeguarding. Most pupils thrive in the welcoming, supportive environment where strong purposeful relationships with teachers help them engage well with their learning and develop as courteous, respectful individuals. The school has implemented generally effective strategies to limit the impact of poverty on pupils' well-being and attainment, though the attendance of pupils from low-income households is too low.

In many lessons, pupils make at least sound progress in their knowledge, understanding and skills. Teaching is particularly effective in a few lessons where pupils make strong progress, although there are a few lessons where teachers' expectations are not high enough and pupils do not make as much progress as they should as a result.

Governors are a particular strength of the school and since her appointment, the headteacher has overseen notable improvements in important aspects including the quality of teaching. Her sensitive and well-considered leadership has re-energised staff and boosted morale. While there is a clearly understood culture of self-evaluation, leaders' evaluations occasionally lack the precision necessary to support the next stages of the school's development.

Recommendations

We have made three recommendations to help the school continue to improve:

- R1. Improve the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals
- R2. Sharpen the focus of self-evaluation to provide precise details on the impact of provision to support accountability and strengthen improvement planning
- R3. Increase opportunities for pupils to practise and develop their numeracy and Welsh language skills across the curriculum

What happens next

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

Main findings

Teaching and learning

Caerleon Comprehensive School's focus on maximising potential is underpinned by increasingly thoughtful planning of provision including largely effective teaching. This has a positive impact on the achievement and progress of pupils. Many demonstrate secure recall of previous learning and make at least suitable progress. A few show a deep understanding of previous learning, embrace a high level of challenge and make strong, often rapid progress. The few who do not make the progress they should are occasionally impacted by shortcomings in teaching or simply do not make enough effort. Pupils with Additional Learning Needs (ALN) make strong progress against their personal targets.

Mutual respect between pupils and staff helps to create positive, purposeful working relationships. Teachers know pupils well and circulate the classroom to monitor and support learning. Most use encouragement and praise effectively to engage and enthuse pupils. This creates a caring, supportive and secure learning environment.

In many lessons, teaching enables pupils to make at least suitable progress. In these lessons teachers:

- establish purposeful routines, have secure subject knowledge and provide helpful explanations, modelling language well
- plan for, and resource learning well, structuring tasks to build pupils' skills sequentially
- provide useful opportunities for pupils to work independently and with their peers
- provide a range of helpful opportunities for pupils to discuss in small groups which supports the development of their oracy and understanding.

Teaching in a few lessons is particularly effective and ensures that pupils make strong and brisk progress. In these lessons, teachers are passionate about their subject and use this to inspire pupils. These teachers have high expectations of pupils' achievement and engagement. The pace of their lessons is matched closely to pupils' learning, and they focus effectively on raising the aspirations of all.

In a few lessons where pupils make limited progress, teachers' expectations are often too low. In these lessons, teachers:

- plan for what they want pupils to do rather than what they want them to learn
- provide too much direction or over-scaffold work
- do not adapt the pace of learning to match the needs of pupils well enough

- do not provide sufficient opportunities to challenge pupils to develop and apply their knowledge, skills or understanding.

In the best cases, teachers ask incisive questions to challenge pupils' understanding, deepen their thinking and to enhance their verbal responses. In many lessons, teachers use questioning suitably to check pupils' understanding and recall. However, teachers do not always use questioning effectively enough to deepen or probe pupils' understanding.

Many teachers give timely and useful verbal feedback that supports pupils to make improvements in their work. However, in a minority of cases, feedback is overly focused on effort or includes excessive praise, reducing its impact on learning.

The quality and impact of written feedback is too variable. In the best examples, pupils receive purposeful feedback which they act upon in a timely manner to improve the quality of their work. In general, written feedback does not provide precise enough guidance to support pupils to improve their work.

The curriculum at Caerleon Comprehensive School is broad, balanced and inclusive and reflects the school's motto of 'Maximising Potential'. The school has a clear vision for its Curriculum for Wales, which is based on promoting the school's values of preparing pupils to be enterprising, creative contributors, in school and in life. The school has prioritised subject specialism whilst enriching the work of the departments through cross-cutting themes.

The Key Stage 4 and the sixth form curriculum offer a wide range of general and vocational subjects. This meets the needs of pupils of all abilities and allows them to follow their chosen pathway. The school collaborates effectively with other schools to increase the breadth and balance of the sixth form curriculum.

The school provides suitable opportunities for pupils to develop spiritually and morally and promotes tolerance and celebrates diversity successfully. Pupils are given various opportunities to understand the history and experiences of Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and to challenge stereotypes through themes such as 'Rap Poetry' in English and 'Who do you think you are?' in history.

Arrangements for personal and social education are appropriate. The school has considered the content of these sessions based on pupil health questionnaires and pupil voice. This helps pupils make and understand the impact of healthy lifestyle choices. There are valuable opportunities for sixth-form pupils to discuss important issues in their enrichment and tutorial sessions regarding their future pathways and making healthy life choices.

The school provides an engaging programme of creative, sporting and cultural extracurricular opportunities for pupils during and after school hours. These include well-attended clubs on debating, composition and gymnastics. There is a well-considered choice of residential visits to enrich the curriculum both locally and further afield. In addition, school productions such as 'The Addams Family' provide a valuable opportunity for pupils to develop their creativity and confidence.

Most pupils demonstrate courtesy and respect for others. They work well in small groups, listening politely to their peers and contributing constructively to discussions. A few remain passive in lessons, but many are enthusiastic and curious learners who take pride in their work. Most sixth form pupils engage very well with their learning demonstrating commitment and perseverance. Their maturity allows them to benefit, for example, from robust self-assessment as a key part of their ongoing improvement.

Since the appointment of the current headteacher, the school has been developing a clearly understood strategic vision for the progressive development of pupils' skills. The implementation of this vision remains a work in progress, particularly for numeracy skills. However, the improved planning and coordination of literacy has secured good support from relevant subjects as they offer an increasing number of worthwhile opportunities to benefit pupils.

Many pupils listen well and respond suitably to the contributions of others. The increased frequency of pre-taught vocabulary supports pupils' accurate use of subject-specific terms when, for example, describing blood flow around the heart. In addition, a few pupils use a wide vocabulary precisely when discussing topics such as the usefulness of the film 'War Horse' as a historical source and the right of people to express their faith in whatever way they wish. Subsequently, this builds their proficiency to use this vocabulary in written responses. In a few lessons, pupils' underdeveloped verbal responses are the result of them not always maintaining focused listening, or shortcomings in teachers' questioning.

Leaders recognise the importance of reading to support pupils' attainment, well-being and personal development. They have taken appropriate steps to establish a culture of reading, although currently practices such as independent reading are not consistent across the school. Many pupils are secure in their use of information retrieval strategies. There is also increasing evidence of pupils reading with empathy when, for example, explaining why the Pope would be concerned by the increase in Protestantism during the reign of Henry VIII, and using synthesis to assimilate various viewpoints about the dissolution of the monasteries. Overall, the majority of pupils use a suitable range of reading strategies to support their learning.

Many pupils produce extended writing which demonstrates a secure sense of purpose and audience. Generally, pupils use an appropriate range of vocabulary. Where their

vocabulary is more sophisticated it is occasionally accompanied by a flair which contributes to engaging the readers' interest. Currently, there is no clear expectation for pupils to improve the quality of their writing before it is given to the teacher. This, along with inconsistencies in teachers' marking for literacy contributes to a minority of pupils continuing to make too many basic errors in their writing.

Many pupils have secure basic number skills and a suitable grasp of the four rules of number. They apply these skills well, for example when solving multi-step equations and when converting between decimals, fractions and percentages. A minority apply their strong numerical skills well when working with complex probability or when applying their financial skills in business studies to calculate profit and loss accounts. Many pupils have a suitable understanding of shape and measure and calculate the area and perimeter of complex shapes competently. In mathematics and a few other relevant subjects, many pupils construct and interpret graphs appropriately. Although, there has been some recent helpful work to improve the co-ordination for the provision of numeracy, overall, pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to develop their advanced numeracy skills, particularly in Key Stage 3.

In engineering, pupils make effective use of their creative and fine motor skills to produce orthographic designs for a camera and in art when independently designing complex abstract and rotational Islamic printing patterns. They also use tablets to re-design these geometric pattern prints using a variety of apps.

Many pupils have a positive attitude towards learning Welsh and make good progress in their Welsh lessons. When reading, they have a secure understanding of familiar Welsh vocabulary and can translate simple sentences from English into Welsh. The majority of pupils use a range of strategies for finding key words and information in short paragraphs. Many write sentences independently with a suitable standard of accuracy and the majority use connectives effectively to organise their sentences.

Many pupils pronounce Welsh words and construct basic sentences accurately. There are suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their appreciation of Welsh heritage and culture through whole-school events such as 'Cynefin' days, celebrations such as 'Diwrnod Santes Dwynwen' and 'Dydd Gwyl Dewi Sant', and residential visits to Llangrannog and Cardiff Bay. However, opportunities for them to use the Welsh language outside of Welsh lessons are limited.

Well-being, care, support and guidance

Caerleon is a welcoming school where staff encourage pupils and support their needs successfully. These positive relationships and personal support help pupils to learn and

thrive. The dedication and commitment of staff contributes notably to most pupils at the school feeling safe, valued and supported to fulfil their potential.

The pastoral team collaborate well and operate an open-door policy, providing beneficial support for all pupils. This includes access to a learning coach, a family engagement officer and a learning resource base for academic support. In addition, pupils benefit from access to external agencies, such as the community nurse. Central to the team's work is the importance of building strong and stable relationships with pupils. The well-considered and personalised support enables pupils to develop their social and emotional responses and re-engage with their learning. Pupils recognise and appreciate the role staff play in helping them to improve their social and academic progress.

Leaders and staff, supported by governors, have created a strong safeguarding culture. Arrangements to keep pupils safe are clear and staff understand how and when to report concerns. The school responds to any concerns diligently. Pastoral teams react and deal with reported incidents of bullying swiftly, providing support for individuals involved. Leaders work effectively with a range of external partners, such as Families First and Mind, to support and maintain a safe learning environment for pupils.

The ALN Team provides a friendly and supportive environment for the pupils in their care. A broad range of interventions ensures pupils receive appropriate academic, social, and life-skills support. The ALN team works and collaborates well with parents, external agencies and school staff to support learners. The team has made good progress towards meeting the requirements of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act. Where appropriate, pupils with identified learning needs benefit from a flexible learning programme during their first years in the school. A flexible curriculum for older pupils allows access to mainstream GCSE classes as well as bespoke learning pathways when required. This contributes to pupils with ALN making strong progress. The school has helpful transition links with the local college and all pupils with ALN progress onto further education or training.

Leaders and staff work well together and liaise appropriately with external agencies to identify and remove barriers to regular attendance. As a result, the school's overall attendance rate has improved, and the current rate is slightly above this point last year. However, attendance for pupils eligible for free school meals has decreased and is lower than the previous year. In addition, the rate of persistent absenteeism has increased and is higher than in similar schools.

The school provides pupils with extensive and valuable guidance to help them select their options in Year 9 and Year 11. Pupils are supported well when transitioning to the next phase of their learning. The school's careers fair and careers interviews are particular strengths of the process.

Pupils value the wide range of opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities such as F1 Club, sports clubs and school productions. The school also provides a range of beneficial trips, such as visits to London theatres and Berlin. In addition, pupil voice, including through the committed school council, influence decision making, including developments in uniform and improved behaviour policies.

Leading and improving

The headteacher provides clear, strategic and compassionate leadership. Since her appointment, she has galvanised staff at all levels and taken considered steps that have secured important improvements, for example in the quality of teaching. Together, she and her senior team have reestablished the school's vision to maximise the potential of all pupils and staff and have linked their improvement planning carefully to this overarching priority. They have prioritised sensibly and planned carefully for the most urgent aspects requiring improvement. This has helped to secure trust between staff and leaders and to ensure that staff are not overwhelmed by improvement priorities. Senior leaders understand their roles and responsibilities well and carry these out diligently.

Leaders have a strong focus on national priorities, such as improving pupils' reading skills and tackling the impact of poverty on educational attainment. They have thought carefully about how to identify and support any pupils at risk of underachievement and provide a range of beneficial support, including to engage them in all aspects of the curriculum. The pupil development grant is used and evaluated appropriately to enhance the school's provision.

Spotlight: Positive impact of governors

Governors are strong supporters of the school. They provide clear and effective challenge to leaders at all levels and have been instrumental in the school's continued improvement. This has included tackling underperformance robustly and carefully monitoring progress towards improvement priorities. Through a range of helpful committees and full governing body meetings, they are fully aware of the broad strengths and areas for improvement across the school. They provide strong challenge to leaders and have helped to secure improvements, for example in the quality of leadership and provision in the school canteen.

Middle leaders are committed to and embrace fully the headteacher's vision for securing improvements. They appreciate the clarity of direction she provides and have benefitted from recent professional learning opportunities to improve their leadership skills. A few particularly effective middle leaders have a detailed understanding of the areas they lead and plan precisely for improvement.

Many middle leaders have a broad understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in their areas of responsibility. They are involved in evaluation and improvement activities and have improved their understanding of the purpose of these processes. Whilst many middle leaders can identify strengths in the quality of teaching and learning in their areas, they do not always identify precisely enough those areas for improvement, beyond whole-school priorities. Whilst line management processes have helped to improve middle leaders' skills, the rigour of actions set following these meetings is inconsistent and it is sometimes unclear how they are followed up by senior leaders. As a result, it is difficult for those leaders to consistently hold individuals to account for improvements in their areas of responsibility, particularly in relation to teaching and learning.

Senior leaders have established a collaborative culture of self-evaluation which involves all staff. Evaluation and improvement processes are clear and support the school in gathering a range of useful first-hand evidence. As a result, leaders have been able to prioritise the areas most in need of improvement. Although leaders use the information gathered from evaluation activities suitably, currently their evaluations and subsequent improvement planning are not always precise enough to support the next stages of development.

The school provides a comprehensive range of professional learning for all staff, which is aligned closely to whole school improvement priorities. Staff value the beneficial performance management process and regular opportunities to engage in professional learning, including through weekly briefings. This has helped the school to secure improvements in the quality of teaching and middle leadership.

There are robust processes for managing the school's finances. Governors, the business manager and the headteacher manage and monitor spending carefully, ensuring that it aligns well with the school's improvement priorities.

Additional information

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not give any cause for concern

The school's arrangements for site management do not give any cause for concern

The school has appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking

Leaders and governors manage the school's finances appropriately, including the use of the pupil development grant.

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

Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. ‘*most pupils...*’ or ‘*very few pupils...*’. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

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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