



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

**A report on**

**St John's College  
Newport Road  
College Green  
Old St Mellons  
Cardiff  
CF3 5YX**

**Date of inspection: February 2018**

**by**

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

## About St John's College

St John's College is an independent day school that educates boys and girls from the age of 3 to 18 years. The school has a Catholic ethos. It is situated in the village of Old St Mellons on the eastern edge of Cardiff.

St John's College is organised into four departments. The infants caters for nursery, reception, Year 1 and Year 2 pupils, the junior department is for pupils in Years 3-6 and the senior school for pupils in Years 7-11. There is also a sixth form for pupils in Years 12 and 13. There are currently 537 pupils on roll. There is little difference in the total number of boys and girls although the balance varies in year groups across the school.

Although the majority of pupils come from south Wales, the school has pupils from other parts of Europe, the USA, and the Middle and Far East, notably from China and Korea. A few pupils come from Welsh-speaking families. A very few pupils receive support in learning English as an additional language.

Around 13% of pupils have special educational needs. The school does not aim to make pupils bilingual in English and Welsh but provides opportunities for pupils to study Welsh as a second language to A level.

The school is non-selective. Pupils in Year 6 are generally guaranteed admission to the senior school. Prospective pupils sit English and mathematics admission tests and a science test is also required for Year 9 admission.

The school's principal aim is to "ensure that pupils develop their full potential in every area of school life. In particular, the school encourages children to develop a kind and respectful attitude towards others." The school also aims to provide a strong moral and spiritual education based firmly on Catholic, Christian principles.

The headteacher was appointed in 2017 and the school was last inspected in March 2012.

## Summary

Pupils at St John's College make strong progress and achieve outstanding outcomes in public examinations at the end of key stage 4 and in the sixth form. Across the school, pupils are exceptionally well motivated and display very positive attitudes towards their learning.

Teaching across the school is good. Teachers know their pupils well and provide useful verbal feedback to them during lessons. The additional support provided to pupils outside of lessons makes an exceptional contribution to their wellbeing and high standards. The new headteacher has successfully shared his clear strategic vision with staff, parents and pupils. The school's leadership have swiftly identified their key priorities for school improvement.

The school meets all of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

<b>Inspection area</b>	<b>Judgement</b>
<b>Standards</b>	<b>Excellent</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>

## **Compliance with the regulations for registration**

Independent school inspections are governed by the Education Act 2002 and related regulations: the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. These regulations require an independent school to meet an appropriate standard in the following areas:

### **The quality of education provided by the school**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **The suitability of proprietors and staff**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **The provision of information**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

### **The manner in which complaints are to be handled**

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Strengthen consistency in the quality of departmental self-evaluations
- R2 Embed quality assurance processes and use the outcomes to drive school improvement
- R3 Share the best practice in teaching to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met

## **What happens next**

Estyn advises the proprietor to amend its current development plan to show what actions the school intends to take in response to the recommendations. It is also advisable to circulate this plan, or a summary of it, to all parents/carers at the school.

## Main findings

### **Standards: Excellent**

The standards achieved by pupils across the school are extremely high.

In the nursery and infants, nearly all pupils develop a very strong understanding of English and mathematics concepts and skills. As they progress through the school, most pupils make at least strong progress in developing these skills. In addition, most pupils develop an extremely secure understanding of subject knowledge and can apply this to new contexts well.

Throughout the school, nearly all pupils are confident and articulate learners and develop their oracy skills to a very high standard. In the infant department, nearly all pupils listen attentively to the contributions of their friends and build on their responses. In the junior department, nearly all pupils make good use of appropriate technical vocabulary, for example when discussing whether materials are opaque, translucent or transparent. Almost all senior pupils can answer questions thoughtfully using an extensive vocabulary. For example, pupils in Year 10 history give extended verbal responses when explaining their opinions about 'Why Hitler wanted the Sudetanland'.

Most pupils read aloud confidently and with expression. Many pupils read for meaning and extract relevant information successfully, as well as reading widely for pleasure. By the end of key stage 2, most pupils read fluently and enthusiastically, and nearly all understand the importance of developing their reading skills. As they move through the school, pupils read and respond confidently to an increasingly complex range of texts.

Most pupils make strong progress in developing their writing skills across the infant and junior departments. By Year 6, many are confident writers who make very effective, adventurous vocabulary choices, for example using metaphors and alliteration to describe the bustle of an inner city. Most pupils in the senior school write accurately and at length with a clear sense of audience and purpose. For example, pupils in Year 7 write gripping gothic horror stories. When given the opportunity, pupils apply their literacy skills well across the curriculum.

Most pupils make effective progress in developing their numeracy skills in mathematics lessons as they move through the school. From an early age, pupils acquire a secure understanding of mathematical topics. For example, the reception class create simple bar graphs to show their favourite flavour of porridge. As they progress to the senior school, pupils increasingly transfer the skills that they have learnt in their mathematics lessons to a wide range of contexts effectively. For example, Year 11 pupils use data handling skills competently to investigate the environmental and genetic variations of snails in woodland and grassland settings.

Across the school, pupils that are more able show particularly strong levels of understanding and application of concepts. For example, Year 6 pupils use technical mathematical vocabulary with confidence when describing the properties of 2D shapes. In the senior school, pupils that are most able are particularly adept at

thinking things through for themselves, reasoning and explaining their work. They make connections between topics quickly and make suitable inferences and deductions.

Pupils' performance at the end of key stage 4 is extremely high. Over the last three years, nearly all pupils achieved the level 2 threshold (equivalent to five GCSEs at grade A\* to C) and the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics. Performance in the core subjects greatly exceeded national averages in each of the last three years. Over the same period, a majority of all GCSE passes were at grades A\*/A. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A\*/A at GCSE is also extremely high. In 2017, a majority of pupils achieved this indicator, which is well above the averages for independent and maintained schools in Wales.

For the last three years, no pupil has left the school without a recognised qualification. At the end of Year 11, nearly all pupils remain in full-time education.

In the sixth form, pupils' performance at A level over the last three years is outstanding. During this time, around 80% of all A level grades were A\*/ A and about 97% of grades were A\*-B. In 2017, 64% of pupils achieved three A level passes at grades A\* or A. These outcomes are exceptionally strong and well above national averages. At the end of Year 13, almost all pupils progress to higher education.

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

Across the school, most pupils are exceptionally well motivated and display very positive attitudes towards their learning. They engage well in their lessons and listen respectfully to the contributions of others. Most pupils show a strong work ethic, for example when working independently in the sixth-form library. Many pupils exhibit high levels of curiosity, are confident and resilient learners, and show high levels of independence. For example, Year 3 pupils read instructions for a strategy game independently and persevere to devise a tactic to beat their teacher.

Nearly all pupils are extremely polite and welcoming to visitors to the school. They support each other very well. For example, sixth-form pupils support younger pupils effectively with their reading. Nearly all pupils show high levels of respect and kindness to those around them and most display exemplary behaviour in their lessons. Most pupils develop positive working relationships with their teachers.

The contribution of pupils to the choir and orchestra is an outstanding feature of the school. Participation rates are extremely high and nearly all participating pupils perform with passion, pride and enjoyment. This makes an extremely positive contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Many pupils also participate enthusiastically in a wide variety of physical activities such as football, netball and hockey, and show a firm understanding of how to keep themselves healthy through regular exercise and eating a balanced diet. Many pupils take the opportunity to attend clubs such as chess, creative writing and debating, which helps develop their personal, social and thinking skills very successfully.

Across the school, most pupils feel that the school looks after them very well and as a result feel safe in school. Many pupils are confident that the school addresses effectively any concerns or worries they may have, and know whom to speak to if they are upset.

Pupils who hold leadership roles take their responsibilities seriously and carry out their duties effectively. Elected members of the school councils listen to the views of others carefully, present their ideas and help influence improvements in the school. For example, the senior school council influenced a change to the curriculum to introduce black history month and strengthen pupils' awareness of fairness, equality and tolerance.

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

In the infant and junior departments, there is a strong focus on developing pupils' core English and mathematical skills. This means that pupils build their knowledge in these subjects progressively and systematically. In the senior school, the provision builds well on this worthwhile start. Senior school pupils benefit from a wide range of individualised choices for their GCSE and A level options, including astronomy, Latin and philosophy. This is a strength of the school's provision.

The school provides a curriculum that is broad and balanced and meets the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

The school implements appropriate schemes of work to develop pupils' subject specific knowledge and skills effectively. A beneficial range of trips and visitors to the school enhances pupils' learning and supports these schemes well. For example, pupils in the reception class attend a dinosaur workshop at The National Museum of Wales, Year 6 pupils measure the speed and depth of the River Ilston as part of geography fieldwork and the history department takes senior pupils to Bletchley Park to explore codebreaking and problem solving.

The school provides a wide range of well-planned co-curricular opportunities. Pupils have high quality opportunities to develop their musical and creative skills through the school's choirs, bands and orchestras. For example, pupils sing in the Metropolitan Cathedral Church of St David Cardiff choir and the orchestra perform at prestigious events, including a performance for HRH Prince Charles. Many pupils benefit from a broad range of other co-curricular activities such as developing their chess playing skills and participating in sports clubs. These activities support the development of pupils' creative and physical skills well.

The provision to develop pupils' application of literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum is developing appropriately. In a majority of subjects, pupils have opportunities to apply their extended writing and reading skills purposefully, for example in history, when developing approaches to historical enquiry or when explaining the physical factors that influence tectonic events in geography. In a few areas, such as in GCSE and A level science lessons, pupils have many valuable opportunities to apply their numerical skills. However overall, pupils do not have enough opportunities to apply both their literacy and numeracy skills consistently across the curriculum in line with their age and ability.

Overall, the quality of teaching is good. Nearly all staff know their pupils well and develop strong working relationships. Most teachers provide clear verbal and written explanations and guidance to pupils. This means that pupils understand how to approach tasks and what teachers expect them to achieve. Across the school, teachers are effective language models and help pupils to develop their technical and subject specific vocabulary very well. Most teachers have well-established classroom routines, which pupils respond to suitably.



Many teachers demonstrate extensive subject knowledge, particularly when teaching GCSE and A level classes. Many teachers use questioning well, to encourage pupils to recall previous learning, to think about what they have heard and read, or to extend their understanding. Many teachers have high expectations of pupil standards. However, they do not always adapt teaching well enough to meet the needs of individual pupils, particularly the more able. On occasions, a few teachers talk for too long, and do not provide sufficient challenge or opportunities for pupils to develop their independence. As a result, pupils do not always make the progress they are capable of.

Across the school, most teachers give pupils useful verbal feedback during lessons. This helps pupils to address any errors or misconceptions in a timely manner. A minority of teachers provide valuable written feedback to pupils about the strengths and areas for improvement in their work. A majority of teachers provide useful guidance for pupils on what a high quality piece of work looks like and what the pupil needs to do in order to achieve this standard. Although there are pockets of extremely good practice, overall the quality of written feedback and the modelling of high quality work is too variable.

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

The school's provision for care, support and guidance is of a high quality. Many staff provide pupils with valuable additional support beyond the classroom to guide and reinforce their learning. This level of support makes an exceptional contribution to pupils' high standards, wellbeing and attitudes to learning.

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is extensive. The ethos and values of the school's Catholic education underpin all aspects of school life from day-to-day activities such as assemblies through to the school's link with the Metropolitan Cathedral Church of St David Cardiff. An exceptionally high number of pupils participate in the school's Cathedral choir and orchestra. As part of the curriculum, younger pupils also make visits to local churches, while pupils in the sixth form study life's complex questions in philosophy. Overall, this level of provision makes an extremely valuable contribution towards pupils understanding the need for compassion, tolerance, respect and responsibility.

The school has developed a comprehensive whole-school system to track assessment information. Across the school, pupil assessments take place regularly and outcomes are recorded centrally. Class teachers, middle and senior leaders monitor pupils' progress robustly and take prompt action when pupils have made particularly rapid or slower than expected progress. For example, teachers send congratulatory cards to celebrate pupils' rapid progress or arrange suitable intervention to support pupils' learning in a particular aspect.

Throughout the school, the high quality provision for pupils with additional learning needs, including pupils with English as an additional language, enables most of these pupils to achieve high outcomes. Staff use assessment information suitably, together with valuable feedback from pupils, staff, and parents and carers, to identify the specific barriers that prevent pupils from making progress. This information is used appropriately to plan and provide a range of effective support strategies such as short-term in-class assistance or, where appropriate, help from external agencies.

The school's makes beneficial provision to help pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles and includes, for example, pupils in the infant school only eating fruit snacks at morning break. The recently expanded range of healthy eating options in the school canteen promotes pupils' understanding of a healthy diet particularly well. The school provides a wide range of co-curricular sporting activities such as basketball, hockey and table tennis, with high participation rates, which helps pupils to achieve increased levels of fitness.

The school's personal, social, health and citizenship education programme supports the development of pupils' social and emotional skills well from an early age. For example, the programme includes regular visits from the school's police community support officer to help pupils to develop positive attitudes towards keeping safe. Pupils in Year 11 and the sixth form also benefit from visiting speakers focusing on areas such as preparing for independence and the need for healthy minds.

Across the school, pupils have valuable opportunities to prepare them to become active citizens, for example on the school councils or as house captains. In these roles, pupils take responsibility for making decisions and influencing the work of the school suitably. This includes the junior school council championing a learning garden for quiet reading and reflection.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

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

The new headteacher has a clear strategic vision that he has shared successfully with staff, parents and pupils. He has restructured the leadership team in order to reflect the school's needs, and to build leadership capacity within the school.

Senior leaders identify accurately the school's strengths and areas for development in the whole school self-evaluation report. Middle leaders are beginning to include a suitable range of first-hand evidence in their departmental self-evaluations. However, this is not consistent across all departments. The highly ambitious school improvement plan is a useful document that provides a secure basis for improvement and identifies key priorities and measurable actions. Senior leaders have made swift progress in achieving many of the plan's specific actions, for example introducing a new management information system. As a result, staff share data concerning pupil progress efficiently. However, it is too early to see the full impact of the school's strengthened cycle of self-evaluation and improvement planning on aspects of the schools provision, for example consistency in the quality of teaching.

The job descriptions that outline the new leadership roles are evolving. However, not all staff have clear job descriptions that define their specific responsibilities, for example relating to the quality of teaching and learning. Senior leaders have begun to monitor the quality of teaching and learning suitably, for example through lesson observations and book scrutiny. However, there is too much variability in the quantity and quality of monitoring by middle leaders.

Senior leaders have revised appropriately the appraisal system. Where there are any areas of underperformance, the school takes robust and appropriate action to address these concerns.

The new senior leadership structure has provided valuable professional development opportunities for existing staff, which has given momentum to the process of school improvement. Senior leaders hold regular meetings with heads of department, which have improved communications and clarified expectations. They also provide regular training on a suitable range of relevant issues. For example, sessions have focussed on improving self-evaluation and sharing best practice in marking and feedback. These activities have increased opportunities for staff to make an effective contribution to whole school improvement. However, although staff access a range of professional learning activities, this is not always linked closely to the appraisal process.

Leaders deploy staff effectively to meet pupils' needs. The school uses its resources well, and makes good use of external facilities, for example for physical education lessons. However, the overall provision for play areas is limited.

The trustees have a wide range of relevant professional skills and experience. They use these effectively to discharge their responsibilities. They are active in determining the strategic direction of the school, and are supportive of recent changes to the school provision. The trustees make spending decisions that link closely to short and long-term improvement planning. They review suitably the cost effectiveness of existing projects, which leads to beneficial changes, for example making improvements to the catering provision.

The school meets all of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

## 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))

Under the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003, the school must provide copies of the report to all parents of the school. Where a pupil is subject to placement by a local authority, a copy of the report should be sent by the school to each relevant authority.

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

<b>Excellent</b>	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 163 of the Education Act 2002. The main purpose of inspection under this section is to report on compliance with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003. In schools that provide non-maintained nursery education, this report also satisfies the requirements of Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

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: 11/04/2018