



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

A report on

Monmouth School for Boys

**Almshouse Street
Monmouth
Monmouthshire
NP25 3XP**

Date of inspection: December 2023

by

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

About Monmouth School for Boys

Name of provider	Monmouth School for Boys
Proprietor	The Haberdashers' Company and the Governing Body
Local authority	Monmouthshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent
Residential provision?	Yes
Number of pupils on roll	475
Pupils of statutory school age	314
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	24/03/2014
Start date of inspection	04/12/2023
In September 2024 Monmouth School for Boys plans to merge with Monmouth School for Girls and Monmouth Preparatory School. The resulting school proposes to educate boys and girls from the age of three to eighteen. At the time of inspection, because of the intended merger, the school is in a period of strategic change.	

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.

Overview

Pupils at Monmouth School for Boys, because of the clear supportive ethos and the breadth of opportunity offered, feel a strong sense of belonging. It is a kind and caring community. All staff, both teaching and non-teaching, are committed to providing high-quality care and guidance to support pupils. During their time at the school, nearly all pupils make secure progress, develop a wide range of skills, and attainment at both GCSE and A Level are consistently above national averages.

The school makes highly effective use of its facilities and grounds and these enhance the extensive curriculum offer. Coupled with an extremely wide range of extra-curricular activities and educational trips, pupils have regular authentic opportunities to learn and develop new talents and skills.

At Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form, the school's curriculum is tailored to meet the interests, needs and future aspirations of pupils highly successfully.

Teachers apply their expert knowledge of public examination requirements highly effectively. In the best lessons, teachers entice pupils into learning and use a range of approaches to continually evaluate and develop their pupils' knowledge. Where teaching is less effective, lessons are overdirected and constrained. Staff know their pupils extremely well and, where appropriate, support pupils beyond lessons pastorally and academically, for example through 'subject surgeries', the Chaplain, Medical Centre and Library. This holistic approach supports pupils to engage positively with learning and benefit from all the experiences the school offers. It is a particular strength of the school.

Leaders at the school are reflective and have a broad range of skills and experience. Together, the leadership team are working constructively with staff as the school moves towards its impending restructure. However, the usual arrangements for quality assurance have, in part, been suspended. As a result, leaders do not currently have a complete overview of the quality of teaching and learning across the school and a secure understanding of the progress that groups of pupils make from their individual starting points.

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

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 Resume and refine quality assurance processes to include a clear focus on the quality of teaching and its impact upon pupils' progress
- R2 Build upon the existing effective practice across the school to improve the consistency of classroom practice
- R3 Make the best use of assessment data to inform and enhance individuals' and groups' progress

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.

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on how it has developed its Library to support pupils pastorally as well as academically, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main findings

Learning

Pupils at Monmouth School for Boys benefit from an education with a purposeful focus on breadth of experience and development. As a result, nearly all pupils leave the school with a strong, wide-ranging and well-balanced set of academic, physical and creative skills, which are well matched to their next steps and ambitions.

Pupils join the school with a range of abilities, with many in line with or above age expectations. During their time at the school, nearly all pupils make secure progress, broadly in line with expected national trends. This leads to strong attainment at both GCSE and A Level, where results are consistently above national averages.

Throughout the school, pupils' communication skills are of a high standard. Most pupils are confident and articulate when speaking, adapting the way they speak skilfully to suit audience and context. Many pupils use a broad vocabulary and often include correct technical language appropriately. Nearly all pupils listen well, both in and out of the classroom. They are attentive to their teachers and encouraging to their peers, using their skills to good effect to develop conversations and discussions. Pupils develop their oracy skills well over their time in the school and, once in the Sixth Form, nearly all use these skills in lessons actively and effectively. For example, when discussing the ethical issues associated with genetic engineering, pupils articulate their own ideas clearly and with sensitivity, listen carefully to the views of their peers, and synthesise these effectively to come to robust conclusions. However, a few pupils in each year group lack confidence when speaking, especially when responding to questions.

A well-developed culture of reading, both for pleasure and academic enhancement, exists at the school. Many pupils make extensive use of the school library to read a wide range of texts, from pictorial novel adaptations of modern classics, through young adult fiction, to non-fiction books recommended for pre-university study. As a result, across the school many pupils read aloud with fluency, clarity and expression. For example, in Year 8, when reading aloud from *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, pupils infer and deduce the appropriate tone of voice to create atmosphere and character. Many older pupils read skilfully to infer meaning and to analyse language use, for example in Year 10 when studying Dickens' use of imagery and vocabulary in extracts from *A Christmas Carol*.

Most pupils develop their writing skills well over their time at the school and a majority of pupils write clearly to explain, describe or persuade. They apply these skills in a wide range of contexts, adapting structure, vocabulary and expression to suit audience and purpose effectively. For example, in Year 9, when writing fictional diary entries for Hajj pilgrims, pupils skilfully blend their knowledge with empathetic accounts of imagined experience to create a compelling and informative narrative. Nearly all Sixth Form pupils are highly skilled at presenting short, cogent written arguments effectively. However, although the majority of younger pupils' writing is at least at the standard expected of their age, a minority do not always present their work neatly enough or do not enjoy the process of writing.

Most pupils develop advanced mathematical skills over their time at the school. A majority of pupils use their numeracy skills effectively to support their learning across the curriculum. They do so with increasing sophistication as they move through the school, for example when using Venn diagrams to classify and catalogue fictional character's traits in Year 7, or to examine commonalities of belief and practice between Sunni and Shia Islam in Year 9. In the Sixth Form, Design and Technology (DT) pupils make highly effective use of geometry and algebra in design and making processes, and in physics pupils make appropriate use of advanced mathematical techniques when studying the kinetic theory of gases. However, on a few occasions, pupils either do not, or are not expected to, employ skills across the curriculum at the same level of sophistication expected of them in mathematics lessons.

As a result of enthusiastic engagement with a wide range of curricular and co-curricular sport and exercise opportunities, nearly all pupils have exceptionally well-developed physical skills. Most appreciate the importance of physical activity to well-being and can speak knowledgably about links to human biology. For example, younger pupils in PE lessons develop their sprinting by considering individual elements of technique and give detailed comparative accounts of aerobic and anaerobic exercise. The majority of pupils put their physical skills to good use in a variety of contexts, for example in regular sporting fixtures or in field exercises with the Combined Cadet Force. Many are adept at evaluatively reviewing their performance and improving as a result.

Nearly all pupils develop strong creative and artistic skills over their time at the school. They are appreciative of, and are enthusiastic about, the broad enrichment opportunities provided by the school. As a result, they employ their creative skills to good effect across an extensive range of musical, dramatic, artistic and technological contexts. For example, Sixth Form DT pupils work in partnership with local businesses. They develop and deliver on design briefs to manufacture products including bicycle luggage and agricultural hydraulics. Pupils throughout the school produce artworks of a high standard, in a range of media including oils, ceramics and photography. Many pupils develop their performance skills very effectively through regular, high quality theatre and musical productions.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all pupils feel a strong sense of belonging in a safe and welcoming school community. Pupils engage with each other, staff and visitors in a respectful manner. In their communications with adults, pupils speak with eloquence, confidence, and clarity of thought. When moving around the school estate and town, nearly all pupils manage risk well, moving safely with a sense of trust and responsibility.

When opportunities allow, pupils absorb themselves in their lessons and show themselves to be bright, resilient learners, who are curious about the topics studied. For example, pupils make strong inferences about current global conflicts from their understanding of the Korean War. They formulate their own learning questions and are comfortable to question their teachers respectfully.

Most pupils are highly attentive, compliant learners who are motivated to succeed, particularly at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form. Nearly all pupils work well individually, however, there are few opportunities for pupils to guide their own

learning independently as lessons focus on public examination content. Across the school, pupils value their relationships with their teachers and believe that they are supported by them well. Pupils appreciate their teachers' verbal and written feedback but are often uncertain of the next steps required to move their learning on.

Nearly all pupils place a high value on the pastoral support offered to them by both teaching and non-teaching staff. They benefit from the care offered by staff, particularly at the medical centre where they feel listened to and cared for. Pupils enjoy the comfort of the space provided in the library and recognise the kindness and sensitivity of support offered by the librarians.

Pupils who hold positions of responsibility in the school do so with pride, motivated by the recognition that they receive, for example the award of ties and blazers to reward outstanding contributions to areas of school life. At break and during less structured periods of the school day, the Sixth Form leaders supervise younger pupils around the school, such as in the Library. Younger pupils appreciate the accessibility of their Sixth Form leaders, profiting from their guidance and companionship during these periods.

The pupils understand how they benefit directly from the school's parent teacher association, the Friends of Monmouth School (recently renamed to 'HMS Friends'). Their 'Lions' Den' system of bidding for resources, where pupils present their requests for funding, is held in high esteem by the pupils. This allows them to feel heard and play an active role in school improvement.

Pupils benefit from the extensive programme of educational visits which brings learning to life within the school. For example, pupils are enthused by the authentic learning experience of a recent excursion to Nuremberg. These pupils identify the positive impact this is having on their learning, such as greater fluency and understanding of dialects when speaking German. Nearly all pupils are motivated by the varied and numerous opportunities to practise sport, further enhanced by the school's robust and enriching co-curricular programme. Nearly all pupils highlight sport as a strength of the school that is an integral part of belonging to the school community.

Teaching and learning experiences

Teachers are dedicated, supportive and invested in their pupils' success. They have high expectations and routinely support pupils beyond lessons, particularly through regular 'subject surgeries'. Teachers apply their expert knowledge and understanding of public examinations highly effectively. This enables pupils to achieve strong public examination results. Nearly all staff have positive professional working relationships with pupils and know them extremely well.

In the best lessons, teachers entice pupils into learning and use a range of approaches to continually evaluate and develop their pupils' knowledge, for example skilful use of open questioning to help pupils build and refine their thoughts and ideas. In these lessons, teachers provide a range of activities that match pupils' starting points well, or organically adapt their plans to allow learning to extend in new and wider directions. Where teaching is less effective, lessons are overdirected and learning is constrained by examination specifications. In these lessons, opportunities

are missed for pupils to think for themselves or the instruction focuses upon learning procedures over developing pupils' understanding of underlying concepts.

During lessons, many teachers provide pupils individually with effective verbal feedback, for example when reviewing work as it is being completed or when unpicking the language of the question to help pupils understand how to respond successfully. Pupils receive detailed feedback on a class level based upon their regular tests and assessments, which helps them to understand their current level of attainment. However, the quality and regularity of written feedback are less consistent and do not always ensure that pupils know what they need to do to improve their work.

In the best examples, the school curriculum is supported by detailed schemes of work that build systematically on pupils' knowledge and understanding to secure progression as they move through the school. However, on a very few occasions, teachers do not provide well-chosen opportunities for pupils to build their broader skills, for example in digital competency. As a result, a minority of pupils do not develop and apply their skills across the curriculum progressively and systematically.

Teachers and leaders collect half termly assessment data to evaluate pupil attainment and identify those who may need additional challenge or support. However, across the school, consistent approaches to evaluating pupils' progress are underdeveloped. As a result, on occasions teachers do not always adapt planned activities and leaders do not have a clear understanding of pupils' individual progress during their time at the school.

Parents receive regular informative reports about their child's progress. These reports identify what their child has achieved and most subjects identify targets so that pupils know what they need to do to improve.

The school's curriculum provides an extensive range of learning opportunities that support pupils' personal development and their acquisition of knowledge. At Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form, the school's curriculum is tailored to meet the interests and needs of the individual pupils particularly well and supports their future aspirations highly successfully. The curriculum meets the requirement for the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

The school's extensive facilities and grounds, including a theatre, boat house and library, enrich and enhance its curriculum highly effectively. Coupled with an extremely wide range of extra-curricular activities and educational trips, pupils have regular authentic opportunities to discover new talents, spark a new interest or to extend their knowledge. The school enables pupils to access competitive sports and activities with other schools, and when appropriate, facilitates pupils to access national level coaching and instruction in a range of sporting and creative areas.

Care, support and guidance

Monmouth School for Boys is a kind and caring community where pupils' personal development and well-being is prioritised by staff. All staff are committed to providing high-quality care and guidance to support pupils.

Pastoral staff know their pupils well and have a strong understanding of their emotional needs. Staff across the school support pupils' emotional needs well, so that they can engage positively with learning and benefit from all the experiences the school offers. The school is developing processes to track pupil's well-being and use this information to identify where pupils may require additional support.

The school provides a broad range of support. The Chaplain, for example through meetings of the Sedgewick society, provides a supportive environment where 'conversations and friendship make a lasting difference'. In addition, the library offers a safe place for pupils, including the 'Happy Café', as well as a valuable resource where pupils can research issues relating to their personal development. The "shelf help" guide helps pupils identify literature that could support their mental health and well-being. The Health and Wellbeing Centre also provides an opportunity for pupils to approach non-teaching staff and find strong support for their emotional and physical needs. This holistic approach to pupil support is a particular strength of the school.

Pupils are encouraged to participate in the arts, including the recent school production of 'My Fair Lady' as well as a choir performance at Haberdashers' Hall in London. In addition, all pupils are encouraged to participate in a range of sporting activities to develop a healthy body as well as a healthy mind.

The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. All pupils attend services in the Chapel and reflect on the messages delivered. In subjects such as religious studies they debate the morality of issues, for example "should society allow genetic engineering?" Older pupils are provided with the opportunity to contribute to the local community, for example working at a local allotment, providing reading support at local primary schools or working in local charity shops. Pupils learn to respect and appreciate other cultures and faiths, for example in music when learning about ragas in Indian classical music or when celebrating the cultures represented in the school by attending the school's international cultural evening.

There are a wide range of authentic leadership opportunities available to older pupils, for example Heads of House and Peer Mentors. There are clearly defined roles and responsibilities for these posts. Pupils receive training that helps them to feel well equipped for these responsibilities, for example when overseeing younger pupils in the day houses.

The school has effective mechanisms in place to identify pupils who require additional learning provision. The additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCo), creates pupil profiles, which include important information for teachers about how to support individuals in their learning. In addition, a very few pupils receive additional support both within and outside of the classroom. As a result, these pupils achieve in line with expectations.

The school is registered with the Welsh Government to provide specific additional learning provision for pupils with additional learning needs, including autistic spectrum condition, dyslexia and hearing impairment. There are currently no pupils attending the school who receive public funding for their additional learning needs.

Leaders are developing a sound culture of safeguarding at the school. There are robust arrangements for recording and following up when pupils are absent. Governors and staff across the school complete regular safeguarding training and there is a well-understood system for reporting safeguarding concerns relating to pupils or staff. The school has thorough safer recruitment procedures and ensures that all new members of staff receive an appropriate safeguarding induction.

Leadership and management

The headteacher sets a clear vision and ethos for the school, that encompasses the breadth of opportunity offered to pupils across the disciplines of academic, sporting, creative and personal development. The well-being and support of all members of the school community is at the heart of the school's work.

The headteacher is supported by a senior leadership team with a broad range of skills and experience. Together, the leadership team are reflective and responsive practitioners.

Leaders have established a worthwhile culture of safeguarding through the school, ensuring that safeguarding is a regular discussion item at meetings and a priority for everyone. Leaders readily consider advice and guidance from outside agencies to strengthen their safeguarding practices further, wherever this is appropriate.

There are clear job descriptions that appropriately define and document staff roles and responsibilities on appointment. However, the forthcoming merger and resultant restructure means that, currently, the allocation and distribution of responsibilities across the school are changing. Over recent time, leaders and staff have re-considered the best possible education for the pupils currently in the school, while reviewing their work to provide sustainable, high-quality provision and good outcomes long term. This review has provided many challenges, but nevertheless, leaders and staff have worked together constructively to begin the change process.

As a result of the impending restructuring, leaders have, in part, suspended the usual arrangements for quality assurance. This means that leaders do not currently have a complete overview of the quality of teaching and learning across the school. As a result, leaders have not built upon existing effective practices to improve the consistency of teaching and learning across the school. The arrangements for performance management have also been suspended, with a view to re-implementing robust arrangements from September 2024. The new system proposes an explicit link between school improvement priorities and professional learning and development opportunities. Currently, professional learning includes a suitably broad range of courses and online training, generally aligned appropriately to teachers' areas of responsibility, their safeguarding responsibilities and exam board specifications.

There are clear arrangements to involve all staff in the school's self-evaluation. Departments analyse their examination outcomes robustly and use these evaluations to inform their individual departmental improvement plans. Together with reports for the governing body, this review process informs whole school self-evaluation and, in turn, the whole-school improvement plan. The priorities that leaders identify are appropriate. For example, there is a current timely priority to develop and improve the

school's provision for digital learning. However, currently the plan's wide-ranging actions do not always have a clearly assigned lead, a resource allocation or a time frame, or have success criteria that relate tightly enough to improving pupil outcomes. This means that leaders are not able to evaluate where actions have been more, or less, successful or provide the greatest impact, in terms of improving pupils' outcomes.

Leaders have begun to develop a single, systematic database to encompass the various assessments and track individual pupils' progress from their starting points. This progress tracker, alongside pupils' attainment in examinations, is beginning to support leaders to evaluate when and where pupils' progress accelerates or stalls. This work is at an early stage of development. Currently, individual departments identify when a pupil is at risk of underachievement, for example prior to examinations. However, leaders do not have a secure understanding of the progress that groups of pupils make from their individual starting points to use, for example, as part of their quality assurance procedures, improvement work and planned professional learning.

There are positive relationships with parents, including regular, informative newsletters, helpful end of year reports, regular assessment grades and parents' evenings. In addition, leaders provide useful opportunities for parents to have their say, for example about the arrangements for the impending merger, and to share any concerns they, or their child, may have.

The governing body provides strong, strategic leadership that fulfils statutory requirements and takes good account of legislation, guidance and the unique character of the school. Governors provide an appropriate balance of challenge and support, learning from what has and hasn't worked well in the past. They act as an appropriate critical friend to steer the strategic direction for the school. They review policies and procedures robustly and manage the finance at a strategic level appropriately, for example to secure investment to improve the school's accommodation and estate for the future.

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

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from parent/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and support staff through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors/proprietor(s), leaders 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
- visit lessons and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning
- 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 had 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 (where appropriate), 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

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website ([Estyn Website](#))

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 publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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