



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

A report on

Howell's School

**Cardiff Road
Llandaff
CF5 2YD**

Date of inspection: February 2024

by

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

About Howell's School

Name of provider	Howell's School
Proprietor	The Girls' Day School Trust
Local authority	Cardiff Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent all age
Residential provision?	No
Number of pupils on roll	661
Pupils of statutory school age	Need to clarify with school number in Sixth Form
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	09/02/2015
Start date of inspection	05/02/2024
At the time of inspection, the long-serving Principal was absent from school due to illness.	

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

Howell's School is an extremely happy school community built upon a culture of kindness and the humble pursuit of excellence. Collectively, senior leaders, governors and staff have fostered an environment which values learning, opportunity and growth.

During their time at the school, many pupils make exceptional progress compared to their peers nationally. Pupils' performance in public examinations is consistently significantly above national norms, with the school's results being among the strongest in the Girls' Day School Trust (GDST). Nearly all pupils leave the school with the academic and life skills which prepare them extremely effectively for their future destinations and ambitions.

Across the school, nearly all pupils display curiosity and conscientiousness in their work. Their behaviour is exemplary. Most pupils persevere and develop high levels of resilience, either through problem solving or active participation in a wide range of enrichment activities. Pupils have extensive opportunities to celebrate and discover other cultures and regularly raise money to support local and international charities. The school supports pupils to appreciate and understand the wider world, whilst developing as highly confident and courageous learners.

Teachers are passionate and committed, and know their pupils extremely well. Trusting, positive and supportive relationships are a hallmark of the school. Teachers are highly knowledgeable and use their expertise to build relevant links across the curriculum. Senior school teachers have a strong understanding of the requirements to achieve highly in public examinations. Across the school, staff have the highest expectations, which they apply alongside the school motto to '*work hard and be kind*'.

Senior leaders operate and lead the school highly effectively, seamlessly blending professionalism and compassion. Governors, both at Trust and a local level, provide effective oversight and strong pastoral support. Consequently, staff feel empowered and continuously drive the high standards of learning, well-being and belonging at the school.

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 Continue to refine quality assurance approaches to identifying aspects of teaching that would benefit from further improvement

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

Learning

During their time in the prep school, most pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), make good and at times very good progress from their individual starting points. As they move through the school, pupils deepen their understanding and acquire knowledge skilfully in an interesting range of learning contexts. This prepares pupils well for the senior school and college where they gain full benefit from a holistic education with a focus on breadth and quality of individual development. As a result, nearly all pupils leave the school with academic, social, physical and creative skills which prepare them extremely effectively for their future destinations and ambitions.

Pupils joining the senior school have a broad range of abilities, roughly in line with national trends. From these starting points, nearly all pupils make at least expected progress, with many making exceptional progress compared to their peers nationally. As a result, performance in public examinations (GCSE, AS and A Level) is consistently significantly above national norms, with the school's results being among the strongest in their Trust. Progress made by groups of learners, including those with ALN and those with English as an additional language, is strong.

Throughout the school, pupils' verbal communication skills are of an extremely high standard. Nearly all pupils are confident and articulate when speaking with adults and peers. Most younger pupils give clear explanations and use correct terminology such as metaphor and allegory. Many pupils are highly capable presenters, demonstrating confidence in front of a range of audiences. For example, Year 9 student council representatives present to their peers and teacher in a lucid, confident, and engaging fashion.

As they move on from the prep school, nearly all pupils are confident and articulate communicators who speak assuredly, using a wide-ranging vocabulary. Older pupils adapt their tone skilfully to suit the audience and context. When speaking in lessons, nearly all of these pupils make highly effective use of a broad vocabulary and often include appropriate technical language.

Pupils throughout the school demonstrate strong active listening skills, both in and out of the classroom. They are attentive, generous, and encouraging to their teachers and peers, using their skills to good effect to develop conversations deepen and discussions.

Nearly all pupils' reading skills develop highly effectively. The youngest pupils use an appropriate range of phonic strategies to read familiar and unfamiliar words. As they progress through the prep school, pupils read with increased accuracy and in various contexts. They use a range of strategies for prediction, summarising and sequencing texts. Most pupils across the prep school read confidently and most of the older prep pupils are extremely adept and avid readers. Nearly all senior pupils read aloud with fluency, clarity, and expression. By the time they reach public examination years, nearly all pupils read skilfully to infer meaning and to analyse language use.

Over their time at the school, most pupils develop their writing skills extremely successfully. The school's youngest pupils get off to a good start in learning the sounds that letters make, and from the earliest age, many pupils' handwriting is exceptionally neat. By Year 6 most are exceptionally able, mature writers, who use their extensive vocabulary highly effectively in fiction and non-fiction genres.

Pupils continue to develop their writing skills rapidly over their time in the senior school. Nearly all write highly effectively to describe, explain or persuade. Older pupils' reading and writing skills are used in tandem as keystones of their learning across the curriculum. They take advantage of opportunities to apply their writing skills in a wide range of contexts, adapting vocabulary, structure, and tone to suit purpose and medium. For example, pupils in Year 9 use *Charlie Hebdo* as a case study to write balanced and well considered pieces examining freedoms of belief and expression.

Most prep pupils make strong progress in developing their mathematical skills. Younger pupils use simple data handling skills and collect information in tally charts when looking at favourite foods. Most older prep pupils have a very good understanding of a wide range of mathematical concepts including a range of approaches to calculate totals and different ways to measure mass, length, volume and time. They use this knowledge successfully when problem-solving, for example when planning a budget for a glamping holiday. Nearly all prep pupils consolidate their numeracy skills well in other areas of the curriculum such as when producing line graphs that show the amount of deforestation in the rainforests over time.

Nearly all pupils develop advanced mathematical skills over their time in the senior school. They use their numeracy skills effectively to support their learning across the curriculum and do so with increasing sophistication as they move through the school. For example, pupils studying product design make highly effective use of geometry and algebra in design and making processes, and physics pupils make appropriate and fluent use of algebra when studying the flow of electrical current through conductors.

During their time at the school, nearly all pupils develop their digital skills rapidly through an array of learning opportunities, which are integrated into their curriculum. Year 2 pupils log on to computers and use software diligently to create a bar chart of favourite fruits and vegetable snacks. Nearly all Year 7 pupils make confident and effective use of an array of digital platforms in analysing and designing commercial posters. When they reach the college, many pupils apply their highly effective digital skills to support their development of associated technological, societal and moral issues. For example, Year 13 pupils examine and describe the complexities of capturing and storing biometric data.

Nearly all pupils develop strong creative and artistic skills. They use these skills to good effect across an extensive range of musical, dramatic, artistic and technological contexts, both curricular and co-curricular. For example, Year 3 pupils design and make Roman shields using different materials and older prep pupils confidently create their own artwork to evoke ideas and contexts, for instance when fabricating World War 2 lamps. All older prep pupils learn musical instruments and most develop a good awareness of music notation, time and rhythm. Year 9 pupils, when creating a 'human timeline' of McDuff's character development in *Macbeth*, use physical theatre

and vocal characterisation to vividly illustrate the character's journey. College pupils use their creative skills highly effectively, in a wide variety of media, for example when creating original furniture pieces including a glue-free 'flat pack' chair, and a crocodile themed bookcase designed to promote younger children's love of reading. Throughout the school, pupils' singing is of an exceptionally high standard.

Most pupils' physical skills develop successfully through a wide variety of beneficial experiences. The youngest pupils develop their fine motor skills successfully and enjoy PE sessions where they develop good hand-eye coordination learning to play tennis. Pupils in the later prep years develop their physical skills very well by taking part in activities such as swimming and participating in a variety of competitive sports such as hockey, football and netball. As a result of enthusiastic engagement with a wide range of curricular and co-curricular sports and exercise opportunities, nearly all senior pupils have well-developed physical skills.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Within Howell's School there is a respectful, purposeful and inclusive atmosphere. Nearly all pupils' attitude to their studies and each other is exemplary. Pupils feel a strong sense of belonging are proud to be part of their community, demonstrating respect for each other, members of staff, and visitors to the school. Together pupils and staff create an environment that values learning, opportunity and growth. As a result, nearly all pupils benefit from the warm, caring and accepting culture at the school.

Nearly all pupils behave extremely well during lessons, unstructured time and when moving around the school. They are polite and considerate towards each other, all members of staff and visitors to the school.

The school's emphasis on academic attainment is understood by the pupils who are determined and focused. Nearly all pupils work diligently in class, collaborate very successfully from a young age and enjoy their lessons. They are punctual and engage well with learning activities and instructions. Most pupils are highly effective in group work situations and listen carefully to each other and respect other opinions. As a result, they answer questions accurately and thoughtfully and develop into curious and enthusiastic learners.

Nearly all pupils demonstrate exceptional levels of concentration and show a real curiosity and conscientiousness in their work. Most pupils talk confidently about the work they are proud of. They sustain their interest and engagement in activities to develop a wide range of skills. Most pupils focus and persevere when faced with complex tasks. When tasks become more challenging, they often use their peers or teachers for support. Most pupils show a high level of resilience when solving problems and develop their independence skills effectively.

Pupils have high levels of trust in the staff and believe strongly that they will always do their best for them. They feel well supported and appreciate the advice and guidance the staff offer them. This builds pupils' confidence, their sense of self, and supports them become independent learners and thinkers.

Nearly all pupils feel that adults in the school listen to their views and take them into account in decisions that affect them. As a result of pupil suggestions, the school has introduced new recycling bins, 'hair down Fridays' and waste prevention schemes at lunchtime.

Nearly all pupils develop as enterprising, creative contributors and participate in a wide range of local community projects. For example, the harvest celebrations supporting a local food bank, charity initiatives such as non-uniform days, local litter picks, and fair-trade stalls to support local and global charities.

Nearly all pupils benefit from an extensive range of effective interventions that support their well-being. Pupils speak extremely positively about spaces within the school to reflect, for example, the 'Friendship Hub' and library. These, and other break-out areas, support pupils to focus and prepare for transitions within and beyond the school.

Nearly all pupils understand the need for a balanced and healthy diet. Most pupils feel there is a good selection of healthy foods. Most pupils value their PE lessons and understand the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. Nearly all pupils across the school participate enthusiastically in an extensive range of enrichment activities throughout the day. These activities include football, tennis, astronomy and choir.

Nearly all pupils have a strong awareness of how to keep themselves safe, including when online and know whom to talk to if they have any concerns about their well-being.

Nearly all pupils have a strong awareness of cultural diversity and enjoy celebrating this together. Pupils from different cultures get regular opportunities to share their culture with others. For example, pupils often perform cultural dances such as Bollywood.

Many pupils are excellent and willing representatives of the school when talking to visitors and they take great pride in celebrating their school. For example, college pupils volunteer to organise and supervise school events. Furthermore, many pupils have effective leadership roles and responsibilities across the school. For example, college pupils act as peer mentors to support younger pupils during lunchtimes and after-school activities. Across the school, pupils discuss and action important issues through the eco-committee. They explore climate change and attend eco-conferences at Cardiff University. Nearly all prep pupils play a role within one of the various leadership groups.

Teaching and learning experiences

The school has been highly successful in building and celebrating a community which provides pupils with opportunities to develop significant personal qualities. The school's curriculum offer is extensive, particularly in the senior school and college, where pupils follow highly individualised curriculums. As a result, pupils make progress both academically and holistically and the school prepares pupils very well for the world of work and/or future academic study.

Teachers at Howell's School have a passion for teaching and a strong sense of pride in all that they do. They have extensive subject knowledge and make effective and relevant links across the curriculum to deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding. When teaching pupils in the senior school and college, teachers demonstrate a strong understanding of the requirements to achieve highly in public examinations. When teaching pupils in the prep school, teachers skilfully incorporate cross curricular themes into their topic planning. For example, when studying World War 2 teachers link together history, design and technology and music.

Across the school, teachers know their pupils extremely well. Nearly all teachers develop strong working relationships with pupils that are based on trust. Their sensitive support of, and positive relationship with, pupils is a strength of the school. This has a positive impact on pupils' outcomes both academically and socially.

Teachers and support staff successfully create a calm and productive working atmosphere where pupils feel listened to, safe and are keen to learn. As a result, staff challenge pupils to achieve as highly as possible alongside remembering to *'work hard and be kind'*.

Teachers across the school provide pupils with high-quality verbal and written feedback. Where pupils respond, this helps them to improve their work, for example correcting spelling errors or re-drafting responses. Teachers carefully support pupils and, where appropriate, offer one-to-one support and mentoring to enhance learning.

Most teachers plan lessons carefully and match activities closely to the learning needs of their pupils. Teachers plan a wide variety of classroom and co-curricular activities that successfully inter-weave, enabling pupils to develop and build upon knowledge and skills effectively. In a very few lessons, teachers provide activities that are overly structured and that do not build on pupils' independent learning skills well enough.

The school's extensive sporting, musical and dramatic facilities further enhance the curriculum providing all pupils with opportunities to compete and/or perform. Furthermore, the school's Talented Athletes Programme (TAP) and Scholars Programme enable pupils to develop their talents alongside their academic studies.

The school offers an extensive and enriching co-curricular activities programme that contributes particularly well to pupils' personal and social development, well-being and academic progress. Most pupils take part in the wide range of activities available. These include regular opportunities for numerous cultural, musical, scientific and sporting activities, as well as volunteering in the wider community. The school offers pupils the opportunity to participate in programmes which support the development of leadership skills, acquisition of knowledge and community work. As a result, the school supports pupils to become highly confident and courageous learners.

The school offers ample opportunities for pupils to visit local, national and international places of interest. For example, in the prep school, pupils visit the Big Pit National Coal Museum as part of their curriculum studies, in the senior school, pupils visit Iceland as part of a biology and geography expedition and the battlefields of France and Belgium to support their studies in history. The school organises

sporting tours for pupils in netball and hockey, and language trips to enhance language acquisition, for example visits to Seville and Barcelona to practise Spanish.

The school keeps parents well-informed about their children's achievements and progress through regular, detailed reports and opportunities to attend parents' meetings.

The school curriculum meets the requirements of the Independent School Standards (Wales) 2003 regulations.

Care, support and guidance

Howell's is an extremely happy school. Staff provide pupils with an exceptionally high level of care within a nurturing and caring family environment. They know pupils well and respond quickly and sensitively to their individual needs. Keeping pupils happy and safe is a whole school priority. Throughout the school, staff promote the importance of being kind and respectful, and as a result, most pupils model these values well. The school provides strong support for pupils' well-being. They use a wide range of nurture programmes to work with pupils in need. In particular, there is a worthwhile well-being programme to enable pupils to settle quickly when they first join the school or move from one phase to another. This is highly valued by pupils and parents.

Developing pupils as informed global citizens is an integral part of the school's work through their extensive programme of cultural development and diversity. Pupils have regular opportunities to develop their cultural awareness through a variety of experiences through the curriculum and events such as 'culture week'. Pupils from different backgrounds often share their cultural experiences with others. For example, pupils from Ukraine perform national dances in senior school assemblies.

Being sustainable is a key part of school life. Pupils of all ages have the opportunity to be involved in different initiatives. For example, older prep school pupils work with an external company on ways to promote becoming a more sustainable community through composting, recycling and promoting the natural environment within the school grounds.

There are many opportunities for pupils to contribute to the school and wider community, and to become active citizens. There are frequent events to raise money for a wide range of local and international causes. For example, this year pupils are supporting a school in Zambia. This work gives pupils a strong understanding of the importance of helping people less fortunate than themselves.

The school enables pupils of all ages to develop key leadership skills, for example through the various pupil representation groups and as form leaders and house captains. These positions help contribute to developing pupils as confident, informed young people.

Staff provide pupils with a broad range of guidance to help them to choose their future pathways. For example, there are many opportunities to hear alumni speaking about their careers. The school gives pupils exceptional, bespoke guidance to assist them in making university applications or to choose other options available to them.

Careers staff continue to provide this effective advice to pupils when they have left the school, should they continue to need information and support.

The school provides pupils with a wide range of opportunities to participate in high-quality musical and dramatic performances as individuals and as part of a group. This includes regular school concerts such as the recent Mary Poppins and 'Ocean Commotion' shows and competing in the Urdd Eisteddfod. Staff ensure that pupils of all ages and abilities have regular chances to participate in sporting activities including, for example tournaments against other schools and sporting tours.

The school identifies pupils in need of additional support from an early age or when they first join the school. There are useful individual 'pupil passports' for each targeted pupil which include a wide range of information including strategies needed to assist the pupil. Pupils have a strong voice in this work as they have the opportunity to record their views regularly and to review the support that they are receiving to enable them to succeed with their learning. A very few pupils have statements or individual development plans (IDPs) maintained by the local authority. In the prep school, the school uses teaching assistants effectively to work with identified pupils in class or by withdrawing them for intervention work. Throughout the school, teachers adapt lessons appropriately to ensure that they cater for the ALN of all pupils where appropriate.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding at the school where it is seen as everybody's responsibility. All staff have a safeguarding interview upon appointment and receive frequent on-going training. The school's designated safeguarding person and her deputies provide strong leadership and ensure that the school's procedures for reporting safeguarding concerns are robust. The school places high regard on teaching pupils how to stay safe, including when online.

Leadership and management

Howell's School benefits from a well-established team of long serving senior leaders who are exceptionally proud to lead the school. They have helped build a lifelong school community and have successfully embedded a nurturing culture of kindness and the humble pursuit of excellence. This ethos is exemplified by the senior leaders who embody the school's motto to '*work hard and be kind*'. They skilfully navigate the complexities of educational leadership, seamlessly blending professionalism and high expectations with reflection and compassion. Leaders respect the valuable contributions and commitment of staff, and are acutely aware of how staff support and promote the outcomes of pupils. As a result, staff at the school feel valued, are extremely loyal and highly cohesive, and work in the best interests of pupils.

Senior leaders understand their school's context and pressures, particularly those related to pupil well-being and the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through a robust framework of policies and job descriptions senior leaders provide staff with important information to help them fulfil their roles and develop a coherent understanding of how the school operates to achieve its goals.

Leaders have established robust arrangements for the development and management of staff which are distributed across middle and senior leaders effectively. Middle leaders play an important role in strengthening the leadership

structure through their cohesive and supportive collaboration. They articulate their areas of responsibility, including well-defined roles within the line management processes confidently. This embedded and effective distributed leadership model is a strength of the school.

Leaders consider a wide range of information, including pupils' results in standardised tests and formal lesson observations, to inform 'continuous conversations' between staff. These 'coaching' conversations encourage staff to self-reflect, collaboratively identify any areas for development and are beginning to develop a low stakes approach to accountability. As a result, staff feel empowered to embrace the implementation of new whole-school approaches such as the recent drive to improve pupils' reading skills. This often results in significant and swift improvements in the quality of the school's provision. Leaders have implemented a raft of changes successfully since the last inspection and have demonstrated their capacity to implement and sustain improvements.

Leaders have positive and effective relationships with parents and maintain strong links with alumni. Nearly all parents hold the school in high regard and value leaders' proactivity and responsiveness to any concerns they may raise. They trust leaders to act in pupils' best interests and value the accessibility of staff. Parents greatly appreciate the effective formal and informal lines of communication that they have with teachers and the school.

The school's membership of the GDST affords leaders and staff beneficial formal and informal opportunities to collaborate with other educators and school leaders. For example, centralised governance of GDST schools streamlines aspects of legislative compliance and the efficient use of resources. Furthermore, subject leaders in different schools undertake informal 'peer reviews' of each other. These highlight effective practices, identify areas for development, and help each other to implement actions to drive improvement.

Staff benefit from an extensive range of professional development opportunities facilitated by the GDST, where they receive training from external professionals and collaborate with other schools within the group. These beneficial opportunities support staff to develop as individuals, teachers, and/or leaders effectively but are not always clearly linked to teachers' individual targets or whole-school improvement priorities.

The school benefits from a dual system of governance, with the GDST providing effective centralised strategic oversight and the local board of governors offering school leaders strong pastoral support and a critical ear. Relationships between school leaders and governors are productive, particularly with the Chair of the local board of governors who is a regular visitor to the school. Governors understand their responsibilities clearly and discharge them with spirit.

Leaders conduct in-depth analyses of a broad range of data, including public examination results, to produce an array of audits and reports for the GDST. These audits support the school's self-evaluation and improvement work suitably but may not always be the most effective instruments to evaluate the impact of improvement priorities specific to Howell's School.

Leaders regularly undertake an appropriate range of quality assurance activities, including reviewing pupils' work and lesson observations. Leaders carefully consider the information gathered during these activities, produce summaries of the overarching themes, and as a result, have accurately identified that strong teaching practice is well embedded throughout the school. Lesson observations, however, do not focus sharply enough on the effectiveness of teaching and/or pupils' progress towards meeting individual lesson objectives. As a result, this limits leaders' ability to identify subtle aspects of teaching practice that may benefit from improvement.

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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