



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

A report on

**Christ College
Brecon
Powys
LD3 8AF**

Date of inspection: October 2017

by

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

About Christ College

Christ College is an independent co-educational boarding and day school situated near the centre of Brecon in Powys and was founded by Henry VIII in 1541.

There are currently 367 pupils on roll, aged from 7 to 18 years, including 111 in the sixth form. In total, there are 209 boys and 158 girls.

Around 16% of pupils are from different countries around the world and 9% of pupils are from HM Forces families. About half of pupils board and the school is organised around a house structure.

Around 14% of pupils have special educational needs and 20% receive support in learning English as an additional language. A very few pupils are from Welsh-speaking homes or speak Welsh as a first language. Lessons are in English and the school does not aim to make pupils bilingual in English and Welsh.

There are 40 full-time and seven part-time teachers. There are a further 88 support staff, of whom 32 are part-time.

Since the last inspection in 2011, there have been some significant changes to the structure of the school. In September 2014, the school opened a junior school section admitting pupils from the age of 7 to 11 years to St Nicholas House. In September 2015, the school extended the age range for boarding provision to include pupils in Year 3 through to Year 6. The current headteacher was appointed in September 2017.

The school motto is 'I achieve because I believe I can'. The school aims to provide a high-quality, broad and balanced education, with strong academic provision at its core and with an emphasis on promoting each pupil's physical, cultural, spiritual and moral development.

The school was last inspected in February 2011.

Summary

Pupils at Christ College achieve extremely high standards and outstanding outcomes in public examinations at the end of key stage 4 and the sixth form. The school supports the wellbeing of pupils exceptionally well. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They have an infectious pride in their school and participate enthusiastically in the wide range of learning experiences provided. Teaching across the school is good. Working relationships are excellent and teachers plan a wide range of interesting tasks that engage pupils very well. The school's personal and social education programme (PSE) is outstanding and is central to the provision for care, support and guidance. Leadership at all levels contributes extremely well to the strong sense of community and commitment to shared values and aims that pervade the school.

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

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	Excellent
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Excellent
Teaching and learning experiences	Excellent
Care, support and guidance	Excellent
Leadership and management	Excellent

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 handle

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Recommendations

- R1 Ensure that teaching provides sufficient levels of challenge for all pupils, particularly the more able
- R2 Strengthen consistency in the quality of whole-school and faculty improvement plans

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 Christ College to prepare a case study on its work in relation to the provision for circle time in St Nicholas House and PSE in the senior school and the extremely positive impact these have on the wellbeing of pupils, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main findings

Standards: Excellent

The standards achieved by pupils at Christ College are extremely high.

Across the school, most pupils recall previous learning exceptionally well and apply their knowledge, understanding and skills successfully to new contexts. During lessons, most pupils gain a secure understanding of issues or topics, for example in Year 6 when decoding algebraic equations to create a maze.

Nearly all pupils listen attentively and with respect to their teachers, visitors and each other. In St Nicholas House, nearly all pupils make valuable contributions to circle time and listen carefully to others. A majority of junior school pupils make worthwhile contributions to discussions, offering opinions and justifying them. Many senior school pupils are exceptionally confident and highly articulate. As a result, their classroom discussions are often thought provoking and extend pupils' knowledge and understanding extremely well, for example when sixth form pupils interpret a text about 'Edward VI and Mary – A Mid Tudor Crisis?'

Most pupils in St Nicholas House read well above their chronological age and show enjoyment in their reading. They use higher-order reading skills particularly well, applying their skills of inference and deduction confidently. In the senior school, most pupils read clearly and with confidence for instance during chapel services to the full congregation. Most pupils interrogate and analyse texts effectively to identify key information and ideas, for example when evaluating responses to the Nepal earthquake.

Most pupils make very good progress in their writing skills as they progress through the school. Their spelling, punctuation and grammar are appropriate for their age and ability. In St Nicholas House, most pupils write extensively for a range of genres, purposes and audiences. These pupils make good use of interesting vocabulary to engage the reader, for example when writing about 'how the camel adapts to its environment'. In the senior school, many pupils write well-balanced and reasoned analytical pieces of writing using a broad range of vocabulary. In the sixth form, most pupils write extremely well, using a sophisticated range of vocabulary to produce extended responses drawing on a wide range of evidence and source material.

Across the school, most pupils develop extremely strong mathematical skills and apply these confidently in a range of appropriate contexts. In St Nicholas House, most younger pupils use a combination of mental and written calculations to solve problems successfully. Many older pupils in the junior school articulate numerical procedures clearly, and they explain their choices and methods confidently. Most junior school pupils apply numeracy skills accurately across the curriculum, for example in a study of the Amazon Basin investigating temperature, rainfall and deforestation. In the senior school, most pupils use numeracy skills with confidence. For example, in science, key stage 3 pupils complete and interpret distance and time graphs accurately. In key stage 4, pupils analyse graphs well to investigate the relationship between temperature and infrared output.

Pupils make strong progress over time, and their performance at the end of key stage 4 is of a high standard. Over the last three years, nearly all pupils achieved the level 2 threshold (equivalent to five GCSEs at grade A* to C) and many pupils achieved the level 2 threshold including English and mathematics. Performance in the core subjects exceeded national averages in each of the last three years. Over the same period, around half of all GCSE passes were at grades A*/A. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A*/A at GCSE is also high. In 2017, around half of pupils achieved this indicator, which is above the averages for independent schools 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. For the last three years, around 50% of all A level grades were A*/A and about 70% of grades were A*-B. In 2017, 26% of pupils achieved three A level passes at grades A* or A. These outcomes are well above national averages.

At the end of Year 13, almost all pupils progress to higher education.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Excellent

Throughout the school, pupils have extremely high levels of wellbeing and positive attitudes to their learning.

Most pupils feel safe, secure and exceptionally well cared for. Pupils have an excellent understanding of safeguarding, particularly its importance in a digital world.

Nearly all pupils have an infectious pride in their school and participate enthusiastically in the wide range of learning experiences provided. They display exemplary attitudes to learning. For example, they study well independently and co-operate effectively in group tasks. Most pupils embrace new ideas and know how to get the best from themselves. They achieve success in a wide variety of ways such as through leadership roles or involvement in musical or sporting activities.

Many pupils understand how to keep themselves healthy through diet and regular exercise. Most pupils participate enthusiastically in a wide range of sporting opportunities to enhance their fitness and physical skills.

Nearly all pupils demonstrate a very caring, compassionate and supportive attitude towards each other and to the adults around them. Pupils have a good awareness of their individual needs and the needs of others. They form constructive friendships, particularly as part of their house family, that enhance their learning and wellbeing.

The behaviour of nearly all pupils is exemplary. They display exceptional manners both in the classroom and around the school. Most pupils arrive at lessons promptly and work purposefully throughout. They approach tasks enthusiastically and maintain excellent focus. Nearly all pupils interact with their teachers maturely and listen effectively to their peers. Most pupils show high levels of independence and they respond confidently to challenging questions and tasks.

Nearly all pupils contribute extensively to school life through their full involvement and commitment to chapel, house activities, clubs, cadet membership, creative performances and sport. Participation in the wide-ranging club programme provides many pupils with the opportunity to develop their resilience, creativity and ability to take risks. Many pupils fulfil their leadership responsibilities superbly, both in and beyond the school community, for example as members of the Combined Cadet Forces. There is strong pupil leadership, including of sporting teams, school houses and the international pupil community. Pupils are very confident that they have a voice to influence change in the school. For example, they were instrumental in bringing about the imminent changes to catering provision.

Teaching and learning experiences: Excellent

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

In St Nicholas House, a very good range of practical learning experiences enhances topic work, for example through forest school workshops on Iron Age skills such as building round houses, spinning and weaving wool, and making ropes from nettles. In the senior school, there is an appropriate choice of options for GCSE and A level. In addition, staff enhance pupils' learning effectively through visits such as to the World War I battlefields in Year 9. In the sixth form, pupils have the opportunity to gain the Extended Project Qualification through studying a topic of their choice, for example 'Fake news and media'. This provides a useful basis for subsequent study at university.

The school's provision for extra-curricular activities is outstanding. In St Nicholas House, pupils select from an interesting range of clubs such as cooking, tie-dyeing and belly dancing. In the senior school, nearly all pupils enjoy participating in the wide range of sporting activities on offer and in the extensive range of after school activities such as pottery, Mandarin and drama. As pupils move through the school, they have opportunities to choose from an ever-widening range of activities according to their talents and preferences. Many pupils learn to play an instrument, perform in the orchestra, sing in the choir or take part in drama productions. For example, the school choir visited Rome recently to perform at The Vatican as part of their biennial tour. These opportunities significantly enhance pupils' wellbeing, their social and life skills.

Across the school, the quality of teaching is good. Working relationships are excellent and staff are particularly effective role models for pupils' social and academic skills.

Nearly all teachers have secure up-to-date subject knowledge and they share their expertise well. Most have high expectations for behaviour and participation in lessons, and activities throughout the school. They plan a wide range of interesting lessons and tasks that engage nearly all pupils very well. For instance, in Years 12 and 13 pupils study and analyse photographs by a well-known photographer and then recreate or modify these to high standards in their own style. Most lessons have clear learning objectives and success criteria, which teachers and pupils use well to evaluate learning. For example, pupils in Year 6 devise their own success criteria to assess constructively the quality of a range of instructional recipe writing.

Most teachers use questioning well to consolidate and extend pupils' learning. Most lessons move at a good pace, build well on previous learning and use an appropriate range of teaching methods. In Year 7, pupils develop a strong understanding of literary terms such as metaphors, using the song 'Firework' as a reference point. In Year 10 mathematics, effective modelling of ideal answers when calculating Pythagoras' theorem ensures that pupils understand the process and the teacher's expectations. However, except in the sixth form, teachers do not always provide sufficient levels of challenge in the activities planned for pupils who are more able.

Most teachers provide a good range of appropriate opportunities for pupils to apply their literacy and numeracy skills effectively in work across the curriculum. For example, pupils in Year 6 write good quality extended recounts of the experiences of Anne Frank during the Second World War. Pupils in Year 9 biology use equations successfully to calculate the strength of magnification when studying cells in the body. Most teachers develop pupils' thinking and independent learning skills particularly well. For instance, in Year 10 physics, pupils devise their own experiments to investigate either the impact of cloud cover or the angle of the sun on the output of a solar cell.

The quality of teachers' verbal feedback to pupils is very good. In St Nicholas House, staff set pupils personal targets in English and mathematics and pupils use these regularly and efficiently to improve aspects of their work. For example, pupils demonstrate clearly how the use of interesting sentence starters helps them to improve the quality of their writing. In the senior school, most staff provide effective feedback, with clear comments and advice on how pupils can improve their work.

The school develops pupils' understanding of Welsh history and culture effectively. For example, visits to Big Pit and Cosmeston Village enhance topic work. A Welsh week for Years 3 to 8 includes a popular eisteddfod and a food fayre. The sixth form benefited from a talk by the eminent Welsh poet, Owen Sheers. Such activities help pupils to broaden their cultural experiences and to develop their own ideas and opinions.

Care, support and guidance: Excellent

The care, support and guidance provided by the school are exceptional. Provision is inclusive, fully embedded across all areas of the school, and contributes successfully to particularly high levels of wellbeing among pupils. There is a rich sense of community and belonging in which nearly all pupils flourish in their academic, personal, social and emotional development. All staff know pupils very well and offer a close network of support that nurtures trusting working relationships.

The school has an effective system to track and monitor the progress of pupils using a range of appropriate formal and teacher assessments. Leaders share this information in an efficient and timely manner with relevant pastoral and academic staff to enable swift provision of appropriate additional support. This support enables pupils with English as an additional language to make particularly good progress.

Arrangements for meeting the additional learning needs of pupils are highly effective and enhance the standards achieved by these pupils. The Head of St Nicholas House works closely with teachers and support staff to devise bespoke education

plans outlining literacy and numeracy interventions tailored to the needs of individual pupils. In the senior section, the additional learning needs co-ordinator and Head of Faculty for Teaching and Learning hold effective meetings to discuss individual pupils' development plans. They put in place timely support strategies for teachers to use and monitor pupils' progress against their targets. Pupils' valuable input to their individual plans in both sections of the school provides teachers with a better understanding of how to support their social and emotional needs. These arrangements enhance pupils' wellbeing extremely effectively and enable them to make good progress against their academic targets.

The extra support offered to meet pupils' emotional, health and social needs is equally strong and further promotes their wellbeing. All pupils have access to guidance or support from a wide range of staff including tutors, boarding staff and medical centre staff.

The school establishes effective working relationships with parents through organising events that bring the school community together and by supplying a wide range of guidance and information. There is regular and meaningful communication from both academic and pastoral staff. As a result, parents feel part of their child's educational journey and know how to support their learning.

The school's personal and social education programme is outstanding and extremely well co-ordinated across the school. PSE is central to the school's provision for care, support and guidance. This support starts in St Nicholas House, where Circle time is an excellent opportunity for pupils to share worries, celebrate success, support peers and develop empathy. Visiting speakers deliver sessions addressing a broad range of topics enriching this diverse programme. These topics include challenging issues such as cultivating good mental health, online safety, mindfulness, and the dangers of alcohol misuse. Chapel services provide uplifting and extremely valuable experiences for pupils. Services include a good mix of spiritual, cultural and moral themes, and pupils lead prayers and discussions around issues relevant to society today.

A majority of older pupils receive good careers guidance through the PSE programme. Pupils receive useful advice about choosing courses in key stage 4 and the sixth form and when applying to university.

Staff promote the importance of good citizenship actively among pupils to develop a sense of tolerance, mutual respect and friendship, along with a spirit of giving. For example, pupils in St Nicholas House have links with a dementia charity and visit residents regularly in a local care home. Older pupils in the Combined Cadet Force march with the local Ghurkha units annually on Remembrance Sunday to foster good community links.

The school offers pupils many opportunities to take on roles and responsibilities that cultivate an appreciation of duty and civic service. Senior school prefects receive effective training in working with younger pupils and safeguarding, which enables them to fulfil their roles successfully.

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

Leadership and management: Excellent

Leadership at all levels contributes extremely well to the strong sense of community, commitment to shared values and aims, and loyalty that pervades the school. It has had a significant and sustained impact on the outstanding standards that pupils achieve and their extremely high levels of wellbeing.

The governing body and senior leaders have established a clear vision, values and ethos that underpin all areas of school life. Senior leaders provide firm direction and set out high expectations for all aspects of the school's work. They communicate expectations well, for example through a range of policy documents and team meetings at all levels. These meetings focus appropriately on strategic issues and pupils' progress. Roles and responsibilities are set out clearly in detailed and specific job descriptions.

The school has refined its leadership structure successfully, distributing leadership roles more widely through the creation of a highly effective tier of faculty leaders. This development has enhanced team working, strengthened the school's leadership capacity and ensured rigorous line management arrangements. It is also supporting the professional development of these staff. Faculty leaders contribute extremely well to strategic decision-making, to monitoring and evaluating provision, and to maintaining high standards in their areas.

The Head of St Nicholas House provides astute and supportive leadership in the junior school. She has created a distinct identity for the junior section and established a strong team ethos where best practice in teaching and learning is promoted particularly well.

The governing body provides extremely effective oversight of all areas of the school's work. Members of the governing body have a broad range of interests and valuable professional expertise. They are well informed about the school's performance and provide robust challenge where there have been areas of underperformance, as well as offering constructive support to the headteacher and staff. The governing body is forward thinking and provides strong strategic direction. It has implemented major initiatives successfully, including opening St Nicholas House and establishing an ambitious educational partnership project in creating a sister school in Malaysia.

There are suitable performance management arrangements that contribute well to supporting staff professional development. Where there are any areas of underperformance, the school takes robust and appropriate action to address these concerns.

The school has systematic arrangements to monitor and evaluate all areas of its work. These include regular lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work as well as external surveys and consultation with parents. Whole-school and departmental self-evaluation reviews include detailed and robust analysis of performance in public examinations. These reviews identify accurately key strengths and areas for improvement. Improvement plans at all levels include an extensive range of actions that address well the school's medium-term priorities and those areas identified through self-evaluation. However, the school improvement plan and a minority of

team plans do not include sufficiently precise timescales and resources. In these plans, success criteria are not specific enough or measurable.

The school has a suitable number of well-qualified and experienced staff. It deploys them appropriately to provide high-quality teaching and pastoral support. There are effective procedures to support staff professional development that reflect whole-school and departmental priorities as well as personal aspirations. These contribute significantly to the effective classroom practice.

The school manages its finances robustly. Resources are allocated directly to identified priorities. This has enabled the school to finance large-scale capital projects such as the new sixth form centre. This has contributed to providing a stimulating learning environment for pupils.

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)

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:

Excellent	Strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
Adequate and needs improvement	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement	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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