



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

**A report on**

**St Michael's School**

**Bryn  
Llanelli  
Carmarthenshire  
SA14 9TU**

**Date of inspection: May 2022**

**by**

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

## About St Michael's School

Name of provider	St Michael's School
Type of school	Independent all age
Proprietor	CATS Global Schools
Age range	3-18
Boarding/Residential provision?	Boarding
Religious character	None
Number of pupils on roll	424
Pupils of statutory school age	323
Number in nursery classes	7
Number in sixth form	101
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs	5% with ALN (0.7% with SEN statements)
Date of headteacher appointment	September 2017
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	13-01-2014
Start date of inspection	03-05-2022
Additional information	

## Summary

Since the last inspection, there have been significant changes at St Michael's School. The headteacher along with several members of the school leadership team joined the school in 2017 and in 2019 the school was taken over by a new proprietor. The school responded promptly to the challenges presented by the pandemic, providing all pupils with worthwhile opportunities to continue their learning online.

Overall, standards achieved by pupils are extremely high. Nearly all pupils are highly articulate, and most are confident when talking to visitors about their work. The standards achieved by pupils in public examinations in mathematics and the sciences are a particular strength of the school. The school provides highly effective support for pupils who have English as an additional language to ensure that they achieve their potential.

Pupils take pride in being part of a diverse school community. Across the school pupils have strong working relationships with staff and this contributes to their positive attitudes to learning and exemplary behaviour. Pupils are confident and capable learners.

Teachers have high expectations of themselves and their pupils. Lessons are well planned and highly structured. In the best lessons pupils have the opportunity to complete open-ended tasks independently or in groups and broaden their learning.

School leaders provide clear direction and promote strong professional values. Leaders celebrate the school's strengths and have wide ranging plans for future developments. Whilst the current governors have extensive experience in education in the independent sector, their role as a critical friend is at an early stage of development.

St Michael's School meets all the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003 needed to maintain registration.

## **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 the role of the governing body to act as a critical friend of the school

R2 Strengthen the provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE) across the school

## **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

Pupils at St Michael's achieve extremely high standards. They develop their knowledge, understanding and skills swiftly, which prepares them well for the next stage of their life. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form pupils' performance in public examinations is outstanding.

Pupils join the school with a wide range of abilities in the preparatory school. The ability level in the senior school is higher. By the end of Key Stage 2 nearly all pupils make strong progress, particularly in developing their literacy and mathematical skills. By the end of Key Stage 4, nearly all pupils make strong progress to achieve well in public examinations and many pupils make strong progress in the sixth form.

Across the school pupils have well-developed communication skills. Nearly all pupils are articulate, and most are confident speaking to visitors. Nearly all pupils listen respectfully to their teachers and each other. They are at ease discussing their work and when responding to questions. For example, Year 6 pupils use their voices well to act out their play scripts using different intonations for characters. They use appropriate scientific language confidently to describe how light travels and how mirrors work. In a history lesson, Year 8 pupils confidently discuss the slave trade and how humans were treated as commodities.

Overall, as pupils progress through the school they improve their reading skills rapidly. In the preparatory school, a few pupils are exceptionally competent readers and read and comprehend a wide range of texts. By Year 6 nearly all pupils use their reading skills successfully to support their learning across the curriculum. In the senior school, pupils use their reading skills effectively to skim and scan texts. For example, in a Year 9 English lesson, they identify the linguistic features used by authors in children's writing. In a Year 10 history lesson, they accurately identify the features of the Nazi policy towards women.

The standard of writing of most pupils across the school is strong. Year 1 and Year 2 pupils write short sentences to describe themselves on holiday and use capital letters and full stops to demarcate their work with increasing accuracy. By Year 6, pupils write for a variety of purposes including newspaper articles, play scripts, persuasive letters and lengthy and exciting adventure stories using chapters, flashbacks and cliffhangers. Many use appropriate punctuation and interesting language to engage the reader successfully. In Year 8, pupils' writing comparing two poems shows excellent structure, detail and analysis. In Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, pupils write accurately and at length to meet examination requirements.

Across the school, most pupils develop extremely strong mathematical and numeracy skills. In Year 4, pupils use a variety of methods to multiply one- and three-digit numbers correctly. By Year 6, many pupils work at the expected or above the expected level for their age. They understand how to use ratio to alter the proportions of a recipe and use their knowledge of shape to calculate the area of parallelograms. In the senior school, pupils have strong mathematical skills and can apply them successfully across the curriculum. In Year 13, highly capable mathematicians work

at an exceptional level. In addition, these older pupils apply their mathematical skills accurately and securely in physics and chemistry lessons.

The digital skills of nearly all pupils have developed suitably due to the effective provision made by the school during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pupils throughout the school apply their digital skills effectively across the curriculum. For example, they produce presentations of increasing complexity. In music lessons, Year 11 pupils use a score writer programme to notate their compositions accurately.

Nearly all pupils develop their creative skills well. In Year 8 drama, pupils use facial expressions, body language and dialogue effectively to convey meaning and character. In Year 10, pupils use their personal experiences as the stimulus to produce high quality pieces of artwork.

Standards in Welsh language are variable across the school. In the preparatory school, pupils' ability to respond to simple questions in Welsh is limited. However, in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, where pupils have chosen to study Welsh, pupils speak confidently and write accurately.

### **Well-being and attitudes to learning**

Nearly all pupils at St Michael's enjoy being part of a community with acceptance and mutual respect at its core. Pupils from richly diverse backgrounds come together with staff to create a family-like atmosphere in which learning from each other is encouraged and valued.

Pupils have a strong awareness of cultural diversity and enjoy celebrating this together. They are proud to be members of the school's diverse, caring and inclusive community. Many pupils appreciate the value of having friendships that broaden and deepen their knowledge of cultures and faiths different to their own.

Most pupils feel happy at school and almost all pupils feel safe and secure. Across the school, almost all pupils are aware of the need to use online platforms safely and responsibly.

Nearly all pupils are exceptionally confident. They build strong working relationships with staff and demonstrate supportive, empathetic interactions with their peers. Pupils have a strong sense of togetherness and enjoyment of each other's company, particularly outside of structured lesson time. Nearly all pupils value opportunities to learn and arrive punctually for lessons. Pupils and staff are aware of the broader school community's focus on academic attainment, and they recognise the link between this and pupils' perceptions of their substantial workload.

Nearly all pupils work diligently in class and enjoy their lessons. They co-operate with each other maturely in pairs and small groups. They show respect for the contribution of others and offer support to their peers. They are enthusiastic learners, keen to participate and answer teachers' questions. Most pupils talk confidently about work they are proud of. For example, in Year 10 and Year 13 Welsh lessons, almost all pupils speak articulately in Welsh about their progress in improving their Welsh language skills.

Most pupils understand the importance of being active and making healthy choices relating to diet and emotional well-being. Many Year 10 pupils participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme at bronze level, and a minority of sixth form pupils participate at gold level. Nearly all participants complete the expedition section of the scheme, effectively developing their independence, problem-solving and confidence in undertaking physical activity.

Most pupils feel listened to by the school, both through the work of the school councils and by staff at all levels. Across the school, elected pupils are proud to be members of the school council. They represent their peers well and are highly active in making decisions on day-to-day school activities. For example, in response to pupil concerns about oceanic pollution and the environment, the preparatory school council led a change away from polystyrene food boxes. They also introduced a tuck shop scheme, the profits from which have been used to purchase play equipment.

Nearly all pupils are active in, and a minority help to organise, the school's extensive charitable action and giving, which takes place throughout each year. For example, members of the school councils recently organised cake sales for Ukrainian charities.

Nearly all pupils have a well-developed understanding of the school's rewards and sanctions systems. Pupils are clearly motivated by the rewards systems, particularly the preparatory school's house points system.

Owing to the coronavirus pandemic, inspectors will not report pupils' rates of attendance during the academic years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. Inspectors will, however, consider the school's provision for monitoring and improving attendance as part of inspection area 4 (care, support and guidance).

## **Teaching and learning experiences**

Across the school nearly all staff have positive and supportive working relationships with pupils and know them extremely well. Teachers have high expectations of themselves and of their pupils and their classes are exceptionally well behaved.

Teachers ensure that lessons are very well planned and highly structured. Across the school, nearly all teachers use effective questioning to assess and extend pupils' learning. In the senior school in particular, pupils build their subject specific skills, knowledge, and confidence through scaffolded practice tasks, resulting in high levels of achievement. In most lessons teaching is engaging, enthusiastic and lively, and moves at an appropriate pace.

Nearly all teachers have excellent subject knowledge and, when teaching Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, demonstrate an outstanding understanding of the requirements to achieve highly in public examinations. In the best lessons, activities are open ended and adapted effectively to offer pupils an appropriate level of challenge. For example, in a Year 5 lesson on 'extreme earth', pupils had to collaboratively design, construct, and test an earthquake resistant structure. The teacher then facilitated a discussion to allow pupils to self-reflect and consider how they could improve their design. However, in around half of lessons the activity is too narrowly focused or too heavily teacher led for pupils to be able to direct their own learning or benefit from opportunities to develop wider skills and independence.

Teachers across the school provide pupils with high-quality feedback, which mostly clearly identifies areas in which their work could be improved. Parents throughout the school receive detailed and informative written reports about their child's progress, up to six times a year. These reports identify areas of strength within subjects and, where appropriate, helpfully relate progress to potential public examination grades. However, a minority of pupil targets in these reports are not specific enough to enable a pupil to know how to improve.

The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum and meets the requirement for the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. In the preparatory school, the curriculum is delivered through a variety of topic and subject-based approaches and pupils benefit from specialist teaching in a range of subjects. In the senior school, the curriculum becomes highly individualised through a rich choice of GCSE and A-level courses, including Welsh, economics, further mathematics, and psychology.

The school curriculum is supported by detailed schemes of work which plan to build systematically and coherently on pupils' existing knowledge, understanding and skills to secure progression as they move through the school. Most teachers follow these schemes of work very closely, for example at Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Most of the schemes of work identify suitable opportunities for pupils to build their broader skills, for example literacy, numeracy, or digital competency. However, in the preparatory school, teachers do not fully deliver the planned provision for the Welsh language.

Throughout the school, there is no effective oversight of PSHE and the allocation of curriculum time for its teaching is inconsistent. As a result, the school does not always know which topics have been covered by individual classes and important aspects of the subject are missed.

Throughout the school, but particularly for older pupils, the curriculum is enhanced through a range of worthwhile co-curricular and academic enrichment activities. These include a range of sports, mindfulness, a variety of musical and arts activities, and a highly successful programme to support aspiring medical students apply to university.

### **Care, support and guidance**

Staff know their pupils very well. They provide strong support for their well-being through regular daily contact and individual support and guidance from class teachers in the preparatory school, and pastoral leads in the senior school. In addition, the school provides an independent counselling service for both pupils and staff. This service accepts referrals from parents, staff or the pupils themselves and provides speedy and personalised support both during term time and holiday periods.

Staff respond well to addressing important areas of concern from pupil surveys. For example, following the analysis of data collected in a national survey, leaders organised a training session for staff on recognising the signs of drug use and one for older pupils on the dangers of vaping.



The school has a consistent approach across the school for dealing with the relatively few instances of bullying or poor behaviour. This focuses suitably on recognising and rewarding pupils' good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning. Younger pupils in particular respond well to this approach and enjoy earning house points.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding at the school. All staff understand their role in ensuring that pupils are safe and well cared for. Staff receive safeguarding training upon appointment and annual updates, including a reminder of the school's policy for reporting any concerns. The designated safeguarding leads meet weekly to discuss concerns about individual pupils. They liaise appropriately with other agencies when needed. The school site is generally secure.

The school provides highly effective support for pupils who have English as an additional language. This includes the opportunity to receive regular bespoke support and to study for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) qualifications. Specialist members of staff work closely with pupils who need additional lessons in English to assist them to access other curriculum areas successfully.

The additional learning needs co-ordinator (ALNCo) ensures that pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) receive the support that they need to succeed with their learning. There is a beneficial system for identifying pupils who may need additional support. All pupils on the ALN register have useful pupil passports which includes information about their strengths and areas for which they need help. Although these pupils have targets for improvement, most targets are very broad. This makes it difficult for leaders to judge a pupil's progress towards meeting them.

Staff utilise the rich diversity of pupils at the school to promote cultural awareness amongst all pupils successfully. For example, there is an annual international culture day when staff encourage pupils to dress in national costumes and to share food and traditions from different countries. In addition, pupils have regular opportunities to share aspects of their culture and religion during assemblies and other school events. The school promotes its Welsh heritage and culture appropriately through whole school events, such as activities and competitions for St David's Day, visits within the locality and curriculum content with a suitable Welsh focus.

Pupils have a wide range of opportunities to hold a position of responsibility, for example by becoming a member of the school council or as a prefect. When Year 6 pupils lead weekly assemblies for younger pupils, they often research and create presentations, for example on the Chinese New Year and Eid.

The school gives pupils beneficial opportunities to raise money for charitable causes. Prior to the pandemic, there were annual trips abroad for pupils to undertake charity work in other countries, for example in Sri Lanka. Pupils support the local food bank by donating produce collected for their harvest festival or volunteering to work there. These activities give pupils valuable opportunities to appreciate the importance of caring for people less fortunate than themselves.

Although the school recognises that it has limited on-site sports facilities, it makes suitable use of local sports facilities to provide pupils with appropriate sports provision. For example, younger pupils have weekly swimming lessons and older

pupils have a regular sports session at the Parc y Scarlets training barn. There are frequent opportunities for pupils to compete in sporting activities both internally in their houses and against other schools, for example badminton and skiing.

## **Leadership and management**

The school is a small, close-knit, family community where staff take pride in developing pupils' skills and achievement to a very high standard. The headteacher is supported well by his senior team. Together, they have set the clear, shared vision and ethos that everyone subscribes to. The well-qualified teaching staff deliver good quality classroom practice and staff have high expectations of their pupils and themselves. Across the school, staff and pupils are proud of the constructive, caring and professional working relationships in classrooms. As a result, nearly all pupils achieve very well.

The headteacher and senior leaders model and promote strong professional values, for example by providing clear and effective leadership through the pandemic. They are highly visible around the school. Leaders have complementary skills and work together cohesively as a team. Leadership meetings are purposeful and business-like and focus well on improving pupil outcomes.

All staff have clear roles and responsibilities, documented in suitable job descriptions. Regular staff briefings ensure that everyone is kept well informed about what is happening in school, and about any relevant staff or pupil vulnerabilities or concerns.

Leaders monitor the school's work closely. They observe lessons and listen to pupils talking about their work and how teachers' feedback helps them to improve. They monitor pupils' targets and the progress towards achieving them robustly and take swift action whenever a pupil is at risk of underachievement. On the few occasions where leaders' monitoring identifies shortcomings in practice, these are addressed promptly, for example through mentoring and coaching support.

Regular departmental reviews and evaluations lead to worthwhile departmental development plans. The whole school self-evaluation report celebrates the school's strengths and successes. It identifies a wide breadth of objectives that are included within the school development plan. Generally, there is cohesion between whole school and departmental improvement priorities; however, the planned whole-school actions are not always tightly focused enough to be manageable.

Leaders identify good practice to share, for example through the regular appraisal cycle, which encourages staff to reflect on their own teaching skills. Appraisals also provide opportunities for staff to identify their professional learning needs. Often in the senior school, these are closely linked to changes to public examinations and the exam board specifications. Whole school professional learning sessions support improvements to the quality of teaching and link to school development priorities, along with annual updates such as safeguarding training. Staff support each other to learn from the best practice that exists across the school. Recently, for example, staff have worked together very effectively to develop the skills they need to use digital platforms for distance learning and within the school. In addition, when restrictions permit, there are opportunities for all staff to observe and learn from their colleagues' classroom practice both informally and through peer observation.

Recently, the proprietor has changed. The new proprietor has appointed two governors who provide governance for the school's leaders and oversee the school's strategic development. However, overall, the role of the governing body is at an early stage of development. There is a positive, professional relationship with parents, and the school provides them with worthwhile newsletters and information.

The school meets 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 going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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