

**A report on**  
**Cardiff Sixth Form College**

**1-3 Trinity Court  
21-27 Newport Road  
Cardiff  
CF24 0AA**

**Date of inspection: November 2025**

**by**

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

## About Cardiff Sixth Form College

|                                                   |                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Name of provider                                  | Cardiff Sixth Form College            |
| Proprietor status                                 | Owned by Dukes Education Group Ltd    |
| Language of the provider                          | English                               |
| Type of school                                    | Independent Secondary Boarding School |
| Residential provision?                            | No                                    |
| Number of pupils on roll                          | 371                                   |
| Pupils of statutory school age                    | 72                                    |
| Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable) |                                       |
| Start date of inspection                          | 10/11/2025                            |

### School context

Cardiff Sixth Form College is a coeducational boarding school for pupils aged 14 to 19 years. It is a multi-cultural community with pupils from over 30 different nationalities studying there. The school is situated near Cardiff city centre in leased premises. The school is registered to accept up to 380 pupils, and there are currently 371 pupils on roll. Many of these pupils are boarders and many are above statutory school age.

Cardiff Sixth Form College offers three points of entry, a 1-year GCSE programme, a 2-year GCSE course and A level. The school is highly selective. The entry requirements for GCSE include entrance examinations in English and mathematics. Reflecting the entry criteria, pupils in the GCSE classes generally have a broader range of ability and most have English as an additional language.

At the time of the inspection, there are no pupils on roll in receipt of public funding. The school provides full or partial scholarships for a few pupils.

The principal joined Cardiff Sixth Form College in 2020 and was appointed principal in September 2023.

## Previous recommendations

- R1 Strengthen the school's current practices to ensure that roles and responsibilities at directorate and governing body level are clearly defined
- R2 Strengthen and refine self-evaluation and quality assurance processes to ensure that leaders focus clearly on the impact of provision on the quality of teaching and learning
- R3 Ensure that plans for school improvement are manageable and focus sharply on the most important areas

## Summary

Learning and teaching across the school are characterised by a positive climate of shared ambition, particularly at A level, where pupils appreciate an environment that promotes and celebrates academic achievement. Strong, trusting working relationships between staff and pupils underpin this culture.

In the most effective lessons, careful planning, purposeful resources and clear explanations enable pupils to develop knowledge and skills rapidly. These lessons offer a well-considered variety of activities that sustain high engagement and enthusiasm. However, in a minority of lessons, especially at GCSE, teaching does not sufficiently adapt to pupils' individual needs. As a result, the level of challenge is inconsistent, and pupils do not make the progress they could.

A level pupils generally develop strong oracy skills, using them confidently in discussion, questioning and reasoning. A few are exceptionally articulate. By contrast, GCSE pupils have limited opportunities to develop their oracy and support for this area remains underdeveloped. Leaders have recognised this as an improvement priority. Similarly, challenge in GCSE mathematics is too low on occasion, with excessive time spent on basic explanations, whereas A level mathematicians demonstrate and build on exceptionally strong skills.

Since the core inspection, leaders and the proprietor have worked diligently on all three recommendations. Governance structures have been strengthened through clear terms of reference, improved reporting and greater accountability. The appointment of a local governor as a critical friend has enhanced support and quality assurance.

Quality assurance systems have been redesigned following a review that highlighted inconsistency. This work is still in its early stages. Leaders have streamlined development planning into manageable three-year and one-year plans that accurately reflect key improvement priorities, including provision for pupils with English as an additional language and further strengthening of quality assurance processes.

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply fully with the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2024.

## **Main evaluation**

### **Learning and teaching**

Many classrooms are characterised by a climate of shared ambition and endeavour. This is particularly evident at A level where pupils greatly value an environment that encourages, fosters and celebrates academic attainment.

Strong working relationships between staff and pupils are founded on trust. Pupils value the strong subject expertise of staff, both degree level subject knowledge and detailed knowledge of the requirements of public examinations. Where teaching is most effective, this subject knowledge supports probing questioning by teachers that prompts thought and drives progress.

In the most effective lessons, as a result of detailed planning, appropriate resourcing and clear communication, pupils develop their knowledge and skills rapidly. In these lessons, teachers plan for a purposeful variety of activities, which fosters high levels of pupil engagement and enthusiasm.

In a minority of lessons, particularly at GCSE, teaching is not always adapted suitably to meet the needs of individual pupils. As a result, levels of challenge are not sufficiently tailored and pupils do not always make the progress of which they are capable.

When given the opportunity, most A level pupils develop their oracy skills securely. They put these skills to effective use when engaging in class-based discussions or answering teacher questions. They listen attentively, ask questions to clarify, and respond in ways that further explore and develop ideas. A few A level pupils are exceptionally articulate for their age. These pupils relish challenging, conceptual discussion, ask probing questions and use lucid reasoning to reach conclusions. By contrast, in GCSE lessons, opportunities for pupils to use their oracy skills are limited, and support for progress in these skills is

underdeveloped. Strategies to develop the oracy for pupils with English as an additional language are underdeveloped. This has been identified as a priority for improvement by leaders.

At GCSE, the level of challenge in mathematics lessons is occasionally too low, and too much time is spent explaining and modelling simple calculations. In contrast, nearly all A level pupils possess exceptional mathematical skills for their age and stage, and they develop these rapidly over their time at the school.

### **Progress towards recommendations**

Since the core inspection the proprietor and school leaders have worked diligently to address the three recommendations.

The proprietor has put in place terms of reference for the governing body. For important areas of the school's work including finance, curriculum and safeguarding, the roles of both the governing body and the college leadership team are now clearly defined. This makes the boundaries of roles clear and enables both groups to be held more accountable. A more structured approach to governors' reports assists them in their ability to evaluate and support the work of the school.

In addition, a local governor has been appointed to act as a critical friend and provide additional support to the principal. This role has a clear remit and strengthens quality assurance processes. There is now a clearer line management structure within the organisation with the principal being directly accountable to the managing director.

After the core inspection, the school made significant changes to their existing quality assurance systems. However, a yearly review determined that systems remained overly focused on process and lacked consistency and clarity. In response, leaders developed a new, bespoke programme of monitoring and improvement work.

As part of establishing a shared vision, staff throughout the school were consulted on the characteristics of effective teaching. Beneficial professional learning has been identified and provided. For example, senior leaders have coached middle leaders on effective observation of teaching and learning. Best practice has been cascaded down to all teaching staff through departmental meetings.

The school now has a coherent programme of quality assurance activity that focuses on the impact of teaching on learning. Although this work has begun to provide valuable information regarding the effectiveness of teaching, leaders are still in the very early stages of establishing resultant developmental priorities.

Leaders have reviewed, refined and republished a shorter more concise three-year development plan alongside a one-year plan for 2025-2026. These documents are more manageable, making it easier to track progress over both the long and short term. The current plan accurately identifies key priorities such as strengthening the provision for pupils with English as an additional language and continuing to strengthen quality assurance processes.

## **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 2024. These regulations require an independent school to meet an appropriate standard in the following areas:

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

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this standard.

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

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this standard.

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

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this standard.

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

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this standard.

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

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this standard.

### **The provision of information**

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this standard.

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

On the basis of this inspection, there is no evidence that the school does not comply with this standard.

## **New recommendations**

We have made three recommendations to help the school continue to improve:

- R1 Continue to work towards the improvement priorities identified in the school's development plan
- R2 Build upon existing best practice to ensure that both planning and teaching are consistently and effectively adapted to the aptitudes, individual needs and prior attainment of pupils
- R3 Ensure that authentic and meaningful opportunities to develop pupils' oracy skills are embedded across the curriculum

## **Safeguarding**

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils do not give any cause for concern.

## **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.

## **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



## Appendix 1: Numbers – quantities and proportions

The report makes references to different quantities and proportions e.g. '*most pupils...*' or '*very few pupils...*'. We use these terms to describe quantities and proportions as outlined in the table below:

|               |                          |
|---------------|--------------------------|
| nearly all =  | with very few exceptions |
| most =        | 90% or more              |
| many =        | 70% or more              |
| a majority =  | over 60%                 |
| half =        | 50%                      |
| around half = | close to 50%             |
| a minority =  | below 40%                |
| few =         | below 20%                |
| very few =    | less than 10%            |

## Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/>)

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 (Wales) Regulations 2024. 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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