

**A report on**  
**Chepstow School**

**Welsh Street**  
**Chepstow**  
**Monmouthshire**  
**Monmouthshire**  
**NP16 5LR**

**Date of inspection: March 2025**

**by**

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

**This report is also available in Welsh**

## About Chepstow School

Name of provider	Chepstow School
Local authority	Monmouthshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
School category according to Welsh-medium provision	
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	799
Pupils of statutory school age	663
Number in sixth form	135
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Secondary is 21.1%)	11.5%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Secondary is 11.2%)	16.4%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	1.1%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	1.7%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/03/2023
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/09/2017
Start date of inspection	24/03/2025

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](https://mylocalschool.gov.wales)

- a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

## Summary

Chepstow School strives to inspire learning ‘for all, for life’ in an inclusive and caring environment where the well-being of all pupils is a high priority. As a result, pupils feel happy and safe and proud to be a member of the school community. Pupil voice is a notable strength, and an influential factor in this sense of belonging.

The school’s core values of positivity, ambition, curiosity, equity and perseverance underpin all aspects of its work. The social and emotional needs of all pupils, including the most vulnerable, are met well and this allows them to thrive.

In many lessons, respectful and purposeful relationships between teachers and pupils, together with good quality teaching, ensure that pupils of all abilities make at least secure progress in the development of their knowledge, understanding and skills. Throughout Key Stages 3 and 4, the needs and interests of all pupils are met well. However, currently the sixth form curriculum is limited.

The headteacher provides strong leadership and continues to steer the school through some challenging times. This has helped the school to make significant progress in addressing national priorities, most notably attendance and promoting the Welsh language. Leaders know the school well but are not always precise enough in their evaluation of the impact of teaching on pupils’ learning. Currently, the school remains in a significant financial deficit and is working closely with the local authority to address this.

## Recommendations

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

- R1 Work with the local authority to ensure robust financial management
- R2 Refine self-evaluation processes so that leaders focus robustly on the impact of teaching on pupils’ progress and plan precisely for improvement

## What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

## Main findings

### Teaching and learning

Chepstow School strives for excellence in all it does. Purposeful, respectful and productive relationships between staff and pupils are a notable feature of most lessons. During lessons, pupils benefit from well-understood routines and many make at least secure progress in the development of their knowledge, understanding and skills. A few make particularly strong progress. A very few pupils make only limited progress when there are shortcomings in teaching or when they do not engage with their learning well enough. Those pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) make sound progress against their personal targets.

Most pupils demonstrate a strong commitment to community and courtesy to others. They arrive promptly to lessons and settle quickly to their tasks. Many co-operate with each other maturely in pairs and small groups, although a very few pupils remain passive in their lessons. Sixth form pupils are mature, enthusiastic and often curious learners.

Leaders have worked carefully with all members of the school community to develop a clear vision for its Curriculum for Wales, “inspiring learning for all, for life”, which places pupils at its heart. It is designed carefully to promote the school’s values of positivity, perseverance, ambition, curiosity and equity. The Key Stage 4 curriculum, which offers an appropriate range of general and a few vocational options, caters for the needs of most pupils. The school’s sixth form curriculum is limited despite being strengthened by online partnerships in a few subject areas.

The school provides beneficial support for the development of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and emotional skills including through the well-co-ordinated personal and social education (PSE) programme. Staff plan activities designed around real-life scenarios and topic-based themes, which develop pupils’ empathy, self-confidence and resilience well. Pupils also gain an appreciation of equity and diversity including the complex nature of societies and the history and experience of Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities by studying a range of topics about social injustice and multicultural societies.

Most teachers demonstrate supportive and appropriate classroom management skills, underpinned by high expectations and well-established routines. They provide positive verbal feedback that supports pupils in developing their ideas and refining their work. As a result, most pupils respond respectfully and purposefully in lessons.

Many teachers have strong subject knowledge and deliver lessons with enthusiasm, which helps to maintain pupils' interest and motivation. They use subject-specific terminology consistently and draw pupils' attention to key vocabulary to support their understanding of important concepts. These teachers are effective language models who help pupils to develop their own use of appropriate subject language in both spoken and written tasks.

In many lessons, teachers plan and deliver a variety of purposeful tasks using engaging resources that capture pupils' interest. As a result, many pupils contribute enthusiastically and work well with their peers.

In the few lessons where pupils make particularly strong progress, teachers have extremely high expectations of what pupils can achieve. These teachers:

- plan interesting and challenging tasks that inspire pupils to think deeply and apply their knowledge and skills in new or more demanding situations
- use incisive questioning to deepen pupils' thinking
- check pupils' understanding carefully and adapt their teaching as required to support learning
- provide pupils with precise and effective verbal feedback which moves them on in their learning

In the lessons where pupils do not make enough progress, it is often because teachers:

- do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can achieve
- plan tasks that keep pupils busy rather than extend their learning
- provide too much direction so there are fewer opportunities for pupils to develop their independence

The school is refining its approach to assessment, which is helping teachers to gain a shared understanding of pupil progress. A minority of teachers provide specific, written feedback that helps pupils understand how to improve their work. However, there is too much variation within and across the areas of learning and experience in terms of the quality and impact of written feedback for pupils.

There are worthwhile and proportionate opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy, numeracy and digital skills across the curriculum. The school is refining its approach to the assessment and tracking of skills, although the evaluation of them remains at an early stage. The work on developing a reading culture, and the focus upon vocabulary, are having a clear, positive impact upon pupils' speaking and writing skills.

Many pupils listen well and respond suitably to the contributions of others. The developments in the pre-teaching of vocabulary support pupils' use of a wide range of subject-specific terms and a wider awareness of language in their verbal contributions. Over time, this supports their reading and builds their confidence and proficiency to develop their writing. A minority of pupils are very articulate when responding to teachers' questions and offering their thoughts on topics such as Sovietisation in the East and the presentation of characters in texts such as 'Animal Farm' and 'A Streetcar Named Desire'. A few pupils' underdeveloped responses are the result of them not always maintaining focused listening, or of shortcomings in teachers' questioning.

In general, pupils are confident in their use of information retrieval strategies in English, Welsh and Spanish. The development of their word-power and their ability to read with good understanding are enhanced by pre-topic research tasks in science and the pre-teaching of vocabulary in different subjects. Well-chosen texts and tasks support successfully the development of pupils' more advanced reading skills in suitably challenging contexts. Examples of this include pupils' perceptive and articulate responses to poetry, such as their reflections on humanity after reading Duffy's 'War Photographer' and their synthesis of historical sources to draw conclusions about the presentation of the 'flappers' in the USA in the 1920s.

Overall, the majority of pupils use a suitably broad vocabulary in their writing. A minority use a wider, often sophisticated vocabulary that enriches their writing and engages the reader successfully whether it be in their narrative work or when discussing events such as the Wall Street Crash. The majority of pupils produce writing that is technically secure and structured suitably. A minority continue to make too many basic errors in their writing. This restricts the coherence and impact of their writing. Currently, pupils do not benefit from any clear and consistent expectation to proofread or improve their work before they hand it to the teacher.

Many pupils have an appropriate understanding of basic number skills. They use the four rules of number well, such as when calculating percentages and mean average. A majority also use these skills suitably when carrying out mental calculations and demonstrating a sound understanding of shape and measures. A few pupils have strong numeracy skills and use their deeper understanding to solve more complex problems and explain and justify their thinking. Whilst pupils have suitable opportunities to practise their numeracy skills in relevant subjects across the curriculum, they do not always have opportunities to apply or develop these skills in sufficiently challenging contexts.

In general, pupils have sound digital skills. The majority develop these skills suitably in information and communication technology (ICT) lessons and in a few relevant subjects across the curriculum. In their ICT lessons, pupils develop a suitable understanding of software, for example when using spreadsheets and databases. In art lessons, pupils explore successfully a variety of photography skills and experiment with different media and techniques during the design iteration process.

Many pupils develop their thinking and creative skills well. These pupils consider the viewpoints of others with sensitivity, and, when prompted, justify their own viewpoint confidently. In art lessons, nearly all pupils experiment with ideas and are motivated by tasks that do not have a pre-determined outcome. For example, when constructing a clay model linked to natural forms, they apply and adjust their techniques to address the challenges they face and are at ease with the uncertainty of the end result.

A notable feature in Ysgol Cas-Gwent is the positive attitudes to learning pupils demonstrate when using Welsh throughout the school. In Welsh lessons, constant retrieval and repetition exercises ensure that many pupils are confident to pronounce and use new and challenging vocabulary and sentence patterns without worrying if they make mistakes. Older pupils can converse independently without over-relying on support materials and a few use a variety of tenses or idioms to develop their responses successfully.

### **Spotlight 1 – promoting and celebrating the Welsh language and culture**

The school is developing a vibrant approach to promote and celebrate the Welsh language and culture. Leaders have responded to pupil and staff voice and have introduced a plethora of worthwhile approaches to support this development. These approaches include:

- a ‘Cymraeg yn y coridor’ strategy for staff and pupils to greet each other around the school
- a five-minute plan to drill and repeat sentences or phrases in Welsh during the registration period
- learning walks to support areas of learning to strengthen their use of Welsh
- collaborative planning and working with partner primary schools

The ‘Cymdeithas Gymraeg’ embrace the Welsh culture enthusiastically and organise activities to celebrate key dates in the Welsh calendar, for example a coffee morning on ‘Shwmae Sumae’ day. These approaches support the school well in its ambition to strengthen pupils’ interest in and enthusiasm for the Welsh language and culture.



## **Well-being, care, support and guidance**

Chepstow School has fostered a strong culture of family where inclusivity and well-being are central to everything it does. They are committed to creating an environment where pupils thrive and develop in line with the school's core values of positivity, ambition, curiosity, equity and perseverance. Pupils and staff are provided with a high level of care, support and guidance. As a result, pupils have confidence in the ability of staff to support them well and nearly all pupils feel happy and safe in school. Pupils and staff are proud to belong to the school community.

The school has a dedicated team of staff who work together effectively and with high moral purpose to foster positive behaviour, including attitudes to learning and acceptance of each other as individuals. As a result of this inclusive ethos, pupils and staff feel valued and pupils' positive attitudes are reflected in their good behaviour in lessons and around the school.

The school takes very seriously its responsibility to support the well-being of all pupils including those who are more vulnerable. For example, it has established a vulnerability index to ensure that all staff understand each pupil's particular circumstances and are able to offer the correct support and intervention. Nearly all pupils know where to find the appropriate support for their well-being and any issues that worry them. Pastoral teams, ALN staff and leaders support these pupils effectively. In addition, the school provides a dedicated safe space ('The Hwb') where pupils benefit from a wide range of support and interventions. For example, pupils access the sensory room that adapts to their emotions. The school offers a choice of very well attended extra-curricular opportunities and clubs, such as volleyball, rounders, chess, coding and homework clubs. These activities support pupils' well-being effectively and help to build their confidence.

The school helps pupils develop an understanding of right and wrong and to explore their spiritual and ethical beliefs. Support for pupils' emotional, health and social needs, physical and mental health and well-being is extensive and where possible bespoke. For example, pupils participate in an outdoor wilderness programme to support their mental health, support Pride week, and learn how to develop a healthy lifestyle through the health and well-being curriculum. The school implements a variety of initiatives to promote inclusivity and celebrate diversity. These initiatives engage pupils in important conversations and foster a culture of courtesy and tolerance. Consequently, pupils feel respected and treated fairly, and in turn exhibit a high level of trust and respect for the school community and visitors. Overall, the school deals promptly and effectively with the very few alleged incidents of bullying. It keeps detailed records and utilises school staff

and external partners, and implements restorative approaches well to support the pupils involved.

Support for the well-being of pupils with ALN is wide-ranging and effective. Tracking of progress in both academic and well-being areas for these pupils is robust and comprehensive, with a variety of interventions that include suitable entry and exit criteria. The school has made sound progress towards meeting the requirements of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal Act (Wales) 2018. Overall, pupils, including those with ALN, receive suitable guidance to make sensible choices for their next phase of learning.

### **Spotlight 2 – pupil leadership**

Pupil leadership is a notable strength of the school. There is a wide variety of opportunities available to all pupils, which includes pupil leadership groups aligned with the school's core values, sports leaders and form representatives. Through these, all pupils, including those with additional learning needs, are given opportunities to develop their leadership skills. These groups hold high status within the school community, influencing decisions and initiatives, and fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility amongst pupils.

Working closely with the senior leadership team and the headteacher, these groups shape an abundance of whole-school changes, such as the healthy eating initiative, charity work, and bespoke careers advice. Each leadership group has clear terms of reference and lines of communication across the school, representing their peers effectively. Currently, a third of students hold leadership roles and most pupils feel that they have a voice in school life and that their opinions and feelings are respected.

The school uses external survey data and pupil voice well to identify key areas of concern for pupils. Staff work well with a variety of external partners to implement a range of strategies to help pupils keep themselves safe. This includes being safe online, safe from exploitation, and making safe lifestyle choices. For instance, the school works closely with partners such as Severn Area Search and rescue (SARA) to educate pupils on water safety prior to the summer months and with the police liaison team to discuss criminal and anti-social behaviour.

Arrangements to keep pupils safe are clear and robust. The school responds to safeguarding concerns promptly and diligently and makes the necessary referrals to outside agencies. It follows appropriate procedures to ensure the suitability of staff and others who are in contact with pupils and maintain a current record of these checks. All staff and governors receive regular training for safeguarding and child protection and are

clear about the school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils. In addition, the school has suitable arrangements for the digital security of pupils and staff.

The school promotes attendance well. Leaders monitor and track attendance using robust systems, and they collaborate effectively with external agencies and a range of partners to improve pupils' attendance. Pupils are motivated by the range of incentives and rewards such as the 'Premier League for Attendance'. As a result, pupils understand the importance of good attendance and attend school well. Although overall attendance remains slightly below pre-pandemic levels, last year it improved at a faster rate than it did nationally as did the attendance of those pupils eligible for free school meals and the amount of persistent absence.

### **Leading and improving**

The headteacher is a passionate and committed leader who is a positive role model for staff and pupils. Her clear vision, that underpins the school's values and ambition - 'Inspiring Learning / Ysbrydoli Dysgu' - is woven through the life and work of the school. This is supported by a positive culture of collaboration with both staff and pupils feeling proud to be part of Ysgol Cas-Gwent.

Senior leaders support the headteacher effectively. Roles and responsibilities are clear, and leaders have a secure understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Line management processes are suitable, and leaders generally provide appropriate support and challenge for staff at all levels.

Leaders have recently reviewed their self-evaluation processes appropriately to create a clear calendar of activities. At all levels, leaders work together well using a range of first-hand evidence to quality assure the work of the school. In addition, the school has developed worthwhile pupil voice activities, led by pupil leadership groups, who work alongside governors. However, leaders do not always focus with sufficient precision on the impact of teaching on pupils' learning. They are over-dependent on analyses of data and do not look at the progress pupils make in books and lessons closely enough.

Whole-school priorities are understood well by staff and form a helpful framework for the improvement planning of curriculum and well-being teams. However, a minority of improvement priorities are too broad and, as a result, leaders do not always set targets that are precise enough.

Leaders are passionate about ensuring that all staff have equitable access to worthwhile professional learning opportunities that enable them to fulfil their roles successfully.

However, they do not always evaluate its impact on pupil progress closely enough. The school is refining its performance management processes. Individual objectives align suitably with whole-school development priorities, although currently they are not strategic enough.

Leaders have been successful in addressing several national priorities, such as implementing Curriculum for Wales, the ALNET Act, improving attendance and promoting the Welsh language. The school has also made strong progress against the recommendations from the last inspection. Leaders have established a culture of safeguarding across the school.

The school has a well-established approach to reducing the effects of poverty, making appropriate use of the pupil development grant. It supports the well-being and attainment of pupils from low-income households through an extensive range of strategies. This has impacted positively on the attainment, attendance and well-being of these pupils.

Governors are highly committed supporters of the school and have a sound understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They provide senior leaders with helpful challenge and support. Governors have a clear understanding of their responsibility to ensure that the school promotes healthy eating and drinking.

To address the deficit budget, leaders and the governing body are working with the local authority to confirm the agreed recovery plan. This work has already helped them to identify and secure important savings in their budget. Despite this helpful work, the school remains in a deficit position.

In addition to prioritising pupil well-being, leaders also consider staff well-being carefully. Regular and open dialogue ensures that staff feel supported and valued. Leaders work productively with parents and the community. There are, for example, valuable opportunities for families to visit the school, meet staff and learn about its work.

Overall, leadership has had a significantly positive impact on many important aspects of the school's work such as securing strong outcomes for pupils, ensuring a positive ethos of good behaviour and creating a vibrant reading culture.

## **Additional information**

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

The school's arrangements for site management do not give any cause for concern.

The school has appropriate arrangements for promoting healthy eating and drinking.

Leaders and governors do not manage the school's finances appropriately, including the use of the pupil development grant. The school has a significant deficit budget and the local authority is working with the school to put a recovery plan in place.

## Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) 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, where appropriate
- visit a broad sample of lessons, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- 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 has 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, 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 28 of the Education Act 2005.

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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