



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

A report on
Rhyl High School

**Grange Road
Rhyl
Denbighshire
LL18 4BY**

Date of inspection: October 2022

by

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

About Rhyl High School

Name of provider	Rhyl High School
Local authority	Denbighshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	1147
Pupils of statutory school age	1147
Number in sixth form	*
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 18.5%)	30.8%
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 23.0%)	18.6%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	1%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	2%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/01/2010
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	20/05/2014
Start date of inspection	17/10/2022

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection. Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: mylocalschool.gov.wales

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

Overview

The headteacher and staff at Rhyl High School ensure that the well-being of staff and pupils is their highest priority. Despite the notable challenges faced since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, staff have worked diligently to help their pupils return to learning by instilling good habits and removing barriers to learning, including those related to the impact of poverty.

Leaders foster a real sense of community and provide strong support to the immediate and wider school communities. Leaders at every level have a genuine ambition to improve all aspects of the school's work and recognise the need for further developments in teaching and improvements to the provision for literacy skills in particular.

Rhyl High School is an inclusive community that places the individuality of pupils at the centre of everything it does. Valuable arrangements for supporting pupils with a diverse range of needs is a notable strength. These are tailored skilfully to each pupil and draw effectively on both internal and external support so that pupils can be the best version of themselves.

Pupils routinely share their opinions with leaders in order to make a difference to the life of the school. As a result, they feel well supported and the majority of pupils are developing as confident, independent learners. Pupils are encouraged to care and respect others and are polite and friendly around the school. However, a minority of pupils do not behave well enough in lessons, which impacts negatively on their progress and that of others.

In a few lessons, teachers' high expectations and careful planning engage pupils' interest and curiosity and challenge them to achieve their best. As a result, in these lessons pupils make strong progress in their knowledge, understanding and skills. Outside of these lessons, the quality of teaching varies too much. In a minority of instances, teachers do not develop pupils' understanding, knowledge and skills well enough and this limits the progress that pupils make.

The school's curriculum offer is a particular strength. It provides personalised opportunities which engage, enthuse, and benefit pupils of all abilities. However, currently, the school's provision for the progressive development of pupils' skills is underdeveloped.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve the quality of teaching and assessment so that pupils of all abilities engage and make strong progress
- R2 Provide worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop their skills particularly literacy across the curriculum
- R3 Improve all leaders' ability to evaluate the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' progress and skills development

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

In lessons, a majority of pupils make suitable progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills. They recall prior learning suitably and apply this appropriately in new contexts. A few pupils develop their subject knowledge, skills and understanding well although, a minority make limited progress overall and have difficulty recalling prior learning. Pupils with additional learning needs make strong progress against their personalised targets in their individual development plans. Pupils in the intervention and support centres achieve very well, for example when working in the school salon or construction site.

A majority of pupils listen respectfully and with attention to the teacher and their peers. They are keen to share their ideas during class discussion such as when exploring DNA and chromosomes, and in Year 8 when exploring white light. A few pupils articulate their ideas clearly, for instance when speculating what a strong economy would look like and how this could be achieved. A minority of pupils offer mainly brief and underdeveloped responses using a limited vocabulary. In Welsh, a majority of pupils develop their speaking skills suitably as they progress through the school. A minority write appropriately using basic vocabulary for example when discussing their interests and hobbies.

Many pupils read simple texts and extract relevant information successfully. A few pupils use inference and deduction independently to enhance their understanding, for example, of characters in novels. These pupils produce well-structured writing and employ a suitable vocabulary that engages the reader well. However, the writing skills of a majority of pupils are underdeveloped. They make frequent basic errors, use a limited vocabulary, and do not structure their writing well enough.

In relevant subjects across the curriculum, a majority of pupils develop their number skills well. They round numbers to the nearest 10, 100 and 1000 appropriately and work confidently without a calculator when multiplying and dividing. In science, they apply their skills to contextual questions such as when investigating percentage yield of chemical reactions. A few pupils perform more complex calculations well such as finding the n^{th} term of a sequence.

Pupils use their digital skills purposefully such as when they significantly transform photographs or when they digitally simulate and manipulate electrical circuits. In general, pupils demonstrate their creativity well across the curriculum. For example, they design and critique fitness training drills or act as a sports reporter writing a live match report.

When given the opportunity, pupils develop their thinking skills suitably making links between different areas of the curriculum. They use methods such as deduction and elimination for instance to locate countries on a world map and they design market research methods to develop a business plan.

In general, pupils develop their physical skills well. For example, they develop their fine motor skills well in technology as they measure, saw, sand, and join wood to fabricate a pencil case. They have good hand eye coordination and participate purposefully in physical activity.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Many pupils enjoy coming to Rhyl High School. They feel that they are supported well through extensive provision, including the school's 'Wellbeing' centre, which caters for the needs of vulnerable pupils. Most pupils understand how to make healthy choices, including participating in a range of extra-curricular activities that aid their physical health.

Many pupils understand the concept of equality and the importance of tackling discriminatory behaviour. However, a few pupils use inappropriate language with each other and in front of adults. Generally, pupils feel safe in school. They believe that the few incidents of bullying are dealt with well by adults, although a very few pupils do not feel safe due to poor behaviour in lessons and during social times.

A majority of pupils work well independently, and display confidence when talking to adults and participating in lessons. However, a minority of pupils do not demonstrate enough perseverance to complete tasks. Although pupils listen to the views of adults and peers, many do not use feedback from their teachers effectively enough to improve the quality of their work.

In lessons, a majority of pupils behave appropriately. They understand the school's rewards and sanctions system and the consequences for not behaving well enough. They are attentive and show an interest in their work. However, at times a minority of pupils exhibit inappropriate behaviour in lessons, such as shouting out and not listening to teacher instructions. A few pupils are late to lessons, which disrupts learning and impacts on their progress and that of others.

Pupils at risk of exclusion make sound progress with the support of specialist provision, such as the 'Hafan' centre. Additionally, pupils with additional learning needs engage well in their learning with help from the 'Achieve' provision.

A majority of pupils take advantage of a variety of effective opportunities to share their opinions and as a result they feel listened to by the school. Pupils take a leading role in shaping school policy through membership of an inclusive school council and student leadership team. Through these they have influenced school policy and day to day practice such as securing improved facilities and influencing the school's anti-bullying policy.

Teaching and learning experiences

The school's curriculum offers pupils a very wide range of stimulating and interesting experiences which are focussed on raising their aspirations. The 'Rhyl Purposes' encourage pupils to be good, happy, brave, and healthy, and ultimately to have a positive impact on the local community.

The way that the school provides pupils with an individualised and tailored curriculum is a notable strength. Staff ensure that the most vulnerable pupils' needs are catered for particularly well. The 'Hafan', 'Achieve' and 'Wellbeing' intervention and support centres provide highly effective curriculum interventions. The school provides strong support for pupils who find it difficult to access mainstream provision on a regular basis. However, opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy and numeracy skills in worthwhile contexts across the curriculum are limited.

The school offers pupils a comprehensive personal, social, emotional, equality and diversity curriculum. This includes valuable opportunities for pupils to engage with the history and contributions of Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities. It also promotes respect for the LGBTQ+ community and enables pupils to challenge stereotypes and prejudice well.

The wide range of extra-curricular activities includes opportunities to participate in sports clubs, the comic book club, and a digital fantasy role play club. In addition, pupils involved in zoology club benefit from activities that enhance the wider science curriculum and have relevance for their work in biology.

The majority of teachers plan their lessons suitably. They share useful lesson objectives and provide suitable resources and activities to support learning. Their explanations are clear and helpful. These teachers provide pupils with beneficial support to understand and use subject-specific terminology. They use positive language appropriately to maintain good relationships and deal with most disruptions suitably. They have appropriate expectations of the quality of pupils' work and the progress they should make. They question pupils to recall prior learning effectively.

In a few lessons, classroom practice is strong. Teachers create a purposeful environment of mutual respect that enables pupils to make rapid progress. These teachers have strong classroom routines and manage pupils' behaviour effectively. In these lessons, teachers have high expectations of the quality of pupils' learning, and they plan their lessons accordingly. They use their subject knowledge skilfully to enthuse learners and plan engaging activities that are matched well to the subject and to pupils' needs to ensure a strong pace to learning. These teachers pose questions to probe understanding and deepen pupils' thinking effectively. They provide timely and constructive feedback that successfully improves pupils' responses.

In a minority of lessons, important shortcomings in teaching limit pupils' progress. In these lessons, teachers tolerate behaviour that disrupts teaching and learning. Similarly, there are weaknesses in their planning, and their expectations of the quality of pupils' work. For example, teachers do not begin their lessons promptly enough or they set tasks to keep pupils busy rather than to extend their learning. In a minority of lessons, teaching assistants are not directed well enough to support pupils' progress in learning.

A majority of teachers identify spelling errors appropriately in pupils' work. In lessons, they offer pupils meaningful verbal feedback, for example by posing additional questions or explaining clearly how pupils can improve their work. However, there is too much variation in the quality of written feedback. For example, it often focuses on effort or presentation without explaining to pupils how to improve their work.

Care, support and guidance

Rhyl High School is a caring and inclusive community, which places the emotional well-being of pupils at the heart of everything it does. Pupils receive extensive tailored support for their individual needs through a comprehensive and well organised support system. This contributes well to pupils feeling valued and accepted.

The well-being provision in the school is a strength and staff know the pupils very well. Pupils who attend the 'Wellbeing' centre work closely with specialised staff to access effective programmes of intervention which meet their needs, for example a programme, which helps young people deal with bereavement and loss.

Pastoral leaders and intervention teams use a range of information well to identify the individual needs of pupils and target appropriate interventions. Leaders monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions regularly with a sharp focus on ensuring that pupils' needs are met. The school places a strong emphasis on reducing any barriers to learning. They provide highly effective support to tackle a range of issues including the impact of poverty. Staff at all levels go above and beyond to make sure that all pupils are given equal opportunities. For example, the school covers all costs for extra-curricular activities and there is support for families with school uniform costs and through the school food bank.

A strong feature of the school is the collaboration with external partners to ensure personalised support for the needs of individual pupils. They work extensively with the local authority inclusion service, youth services and social services to make sure that all pupils have the support they need to attend school and be successful. Also, the school nurse provides helpful advice to pupils and families and regularly holds drop-in sessions where young people can talk about any concerns.

Pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) receive high-quality tailored support. The additional learning needs co-ordinator and his team review their provision regularly and adapt it according to the individual needs of the pupils. For example, pupils with complex needs access a wide variety of alternative provision to improve their personal and social skills. The school has made good progress with transitioning to the new ALN system. They apply a person-centred approach to all their work effectively and as a consequence, pupils who attend the 'Achieve' centre feel safe. Processes for monitoring and tracking the progress of pupils with ALN are robust. Staff and pupils together produce useful one-page profiles, which have contributions from the pupils' families. In general, staff use these well to support pupils to make strong progress.

The 'Hafan' centre provides valuable support for pupils who need additional help with their emotional and behavioural challenges. Using adapted timetables, staff plan and deliver beneficial programmes to improve pupils' behaviour and to maximise their engagement. The school provides opportunities for pupils to experience alternative courses both on-site and off-site whilst ensuring a focus on core subjects such as English and mathematics.

The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development well. This provision, along with form time and school assemblies, offers pupils valuable opportunities to appreciate different cultures and religions. For example, pupils have explored kindness, respect, and equality through their work developing a 'Kindness Charter'. There are good opportunities for pupils to develop an understanding of their own identity and know how to show respect for the views of others. This helps pupils to be confident to share their views and support others when discussing issues around gender and inclusion for instance.

There is a broad range of extra-curricular clubs available after school and pupils are actively encouraged to participate. These include a variety of artistic, games and sporting activities, which provide opportunities for pupils to contribute physically and

creatively, and to work as part of a team. The school provides suitable opportunities for pupils to celebrate being Welsh and their Welsh heritage, for example through the Ciriw Cymraeg, Welsh phrase of the week and opportunities to engage with the Urdd club.

The school provides purposeful opportunities for pupils to influence the life of the school. For example, all form classes elect representatives to the school council. The school council meets regularly for members to discuss current issues. There are clear agendas and actions from meetings which are regularly shared with pupils through a designated website. Through regular surveys and consultations pupils have many opportunities to share their views on important issues. The arrangements for pupils to share their views on the quality of teaching and learning are developing suitably.

Staff work well with partner organisations to guide pupils with their next steps, including through the local college and Careers Wales. This supports pupils to make appropriate choices when they leave school.

Since they have returned to school following the COVID-19 pandemic, the school has implemented strong systems to promote good attendance and a range of helpful strategies to monitor and intervene with poor behaviour. For example, the development of the behavioural system and 'homebases' supports pupils to improve their behaviour and return to learning.

The school has an effective safeguarding culture. Staff respond to safeguarding concerns promptly and effectively. The school provides timely, valuable intervention support and makes the necessary referrals to outside agencies. The monthly meeting, chaired by the school with a range of external agencies, including the police, CAMHS, and youth justice, is a notable strength in the safeguarding culture of the school.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides strong and passionate leadership. She is supported well by her senior team whose roles and responsibilities are distributed equitably. They place the well-being of all at the heart of their work and this helps to create a strong sense of community. School leaders and staff have responded sensitively to the considerable challenges faced by the school, and its wider community, as it recovers from the pandemic. They promote well important values such as care and respect. This encourages pupils to be 'brave, happy and the best person they can'. However, leaders have not focused strongly enough on improving the quality of teaching and developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum.

Senior leaders have high expectations of themselves and everyone else in the school community. Line management processes are clear, and leaders provide appropriate support and challenge for staff at all levels with a strong focus upon pastoral care and compliance with classroom 'non-negotiables'.

There is a suitable range of self-evaluation and improvement planning activities that provides leaders with first-hand evidence about the school's work. This has proved beneficial in supporting pupils' well-being, but currently processes focus too heavily on routines or compliance instead of the impact that teaching has on pupils'

progress. This makes it very difficult for leaders to identify accurately aspects of teaching and provision for skills that are most in need of development, and to plan precisely to secure the improvements required. Currently, although most middle leaders recognise the need and desire to develop teaching, around half are not secure about how to evaluate the impact teaching has on the standards pupils achieve and how well they develop their skills.

Arrangements for managing the performance of staff are suitable and link appropriately to the school's professional learning offer. This offer is informed by the school's identified improvement priorities and by national priorities.

Teachers and middle leaders are supported suitably to achieve their individual targets through the school's coaching model. This model allows peers to reflect together meaningfully on what needs to improve within their own areas of responsibility, and to identify possible approaches to developing practice. This develops leadership behaviours successfully and builds a culture where individuals take responsibility for their professional growth in the school. This process is supported by regular in-house professional learning sessions on key improvement priorities. In these sessions, staff share practice that has been identified through quality assurance and through peer-coaching. This helps build staff confidence and has been successful in enhancing the school's practice to support pupils' well-being, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic.

The school's professional learning plans include a generally useful focus on generic aspects of teaching and the integral skills. However, overall, professional learning has not had sufficient impact on teaching and learning including middle leaders' ability to identify precisely the strengths and areas for development in classroom practice.

Governors are proud of their school and there is a well-developed culture of trust between them and the senior leaders. Currently, governors query budget spending, contribute helpfully to the behaviour policy and ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to promote healthy eating and drinking. However, they do not provide enough challenge to the school regarding the quality of teaching and learning.

Leaders and governors manage the budget appropriately, ensuring that the school is well resourced and improvement priorities are funded suitably. Senior leaders make thoughtful use of grant funding, including the pupil development grant, to increase the school's capacity to support pupils' learning and well-being, and to off-set the impact of poverty on pupils' learning opportunities and progress.

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

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

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