

A report on
Fairholme Prep. School

**The Mount
Mount Road
St Asaph
Denbighshire
LL17 0DH**

Date of inspection: February 2026

by

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

About Fairholme Prep. School

Name of provider	Fairholme Prep. School
Proprietor status	Individual proprietor
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Independent
Residential provision?	No
Number of pupils on roll	49
Pupils of statutory school age	44
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	22/02/2017
Start date of inspection	23/02/2026

School context:

Fairholme Preparatory School is an independent primary school in St. Asaph, Denbighshire, for boys and girls aged three to eleven years old. The school was founded in 1900 and moved to its present site in 1964. The current proprietor has owned the school since 2009.

The school has a kindergarten and seven classes named Form I (reception) to Form VII (Year 6).

Many pupils live in the local area and a few travel from surrounding rural areas. Almost all pupils speak English as their first language. No pupils speak Welsh as their first language.

The school does not aim to make pupils bilingual in English and Welsh.

The school was last inspected in 2017, when the current headteacher was in post. Further, nearly all staff are long serving.

The school encourages pupils to 'aspire to excellence, maximise potential, develop confidence and express individuality' through fostering responsibility in 'a culture of caring'

Summary

Fairholme Preparatory School provides an aspirational, nurturing environment built around its vision of “learning, friendship, ambition and discovery.” The school fosters an exceptionally strong sense of belonging, with pupils, parents and staff demonstrating deep loyalty and pride. Nearly all pupils report that they feel safe and secure, and their attitudes towards learning and one another are exemplary. Classrooms are calm, purposeful and inclusive, underpinned by high expectations and respectful professional relationships.

The school offers a broad, balanced and well-sequenced curriculum that supports academic and personal development well. Teaching is effective across the school, with teachers demonstrating secure subject knowledge. Lessons are typically well planned and build knowledge and skills systematically over time. Teachers often use questioning effectively to deepen thinking, particularly in mathematics and reading, and nearly all teachers provide timely, effective verbal feedback which supports pupils to progress. However, in a minority of lessons, learning activities are overly directed and pupils complete identical tasks. As a result, opportunities for pupils to develop independence, problem-solving skills and deeper thinking are sometimes limited

Pupils achieve strong outcomes. Nearly all secure entry to their school of choice at the end of Form VII. Oracy skills are highly developed, and pupils grow in confidence as they move through the school. They make strong progress in reading, writing and mathematics, and develop well-presented work and fluent cursive handwriting. Creative, dramatical, musical and physical skills are also strengths, alongside confident use of digital technologies.

Leadership is clear and purposeful. The principal has embedded a shared vision and maintains strong relationships with parents. Safeguarding arrangements are robust. While leaders identify improvement priorities effectively, quality assurance processes do not always identify inconsistencies in policy and practice or address where school improvement priorities take longer than planned to embed.

Overall, the school provides a supportive family environment in which pupils thrive academically and personally.

Main evaluation

Learning, friendship, ambition and discovery:

Fairholme Preparatory School is an aspirational learning environment that encourages pupils to achieve highly without placing undue pressure on them. There is an exceptionally strong sense of belonging within the school community, where pupils, parents and staff demonstrate deep loyalty and pride in their school.

Pupils' attitudes towards school and one another are exemplary, contributing to a respectful, purposeful and inclusive atmosphere. Nearly all pupils report that they feel safe and secure. They value being part of the school community and show genuine respect for their peers and staff. Collectively, pupils and adults foster a culture that promotes positive behaviour, mutual respect and a commitment to learning.

Learning: teaching

The school provides a broad, balanced and well-sequenced curriculum that meets the needs of pupils and supports their academic and personal development effectively. Curriculum planning is generally coherent and progressive, underpinned by clear schemes of work that show how pupils apply their skills across the curriculum. In the early years a topic-based approach is employed, whereas generally from Form II upwards, subjects are taught discretely and often by a subject specialist. Subject leaders and teachers work collaboratively to ensure strong continuity between year groups. The curriculum is enriched successfully through meaningful clubs and activities which take place in breaks, lunch time and after school, and further through whole school and charitable events which support the development of pupils' rights and understanding of others.

Across the school, teachers establish strong, positive and respectful relationships with pupils whom they know extremely well. Teaching across the school supports pupils to make generally strong progress over time. However, the quality of teaching is not consistently strong across all subjects and year groups, particularly where activities are overly structured or provide limited opportunities for pupils to think independently. Nearly all pupils respond well to clear routines and high expectations in lessons. As a result, classrooms are calm, focused and conducive to learning which supports pupils to engage with their learning well and to sustain concentration throughout lessons.

Throughout the school, teachers demonstrate secure, specialist subject knowledge that enables them to provide clear explanations and model expectations well. Lessons are generally well planned and resourced. Teachers explain clearly what pupils are expected to learn. As a result, classrooms are orderly and purposeful. Over time, lessons and sequences of lessons build pupils' knowledge and skills systematically, and in early years,

teachers provide engaging, well-considered activities that provide pupils with opportunities to explore topics in different ways. For example, when exploring numbers, pupils identify, match, sort, count, and write numbers through different tasks and play related games using digital technologies to further embed their understanding. However, pupils frequently complete identical tasks or copy information provided by the teacher. This reduces opportunities for pupils to explain ideas in their own words or demonstrate deeper understanding.

Teachers' use of questioning is often purposeful, insistent and used to deepen pupils' thinking, particularly in mathematics and reading where teachers draw out pupils' methods for solving problems or when defining unfamiliar words or making inferences from texts. Through these opportunities, pupils demonstrate strong oracy and thinking skills.

Teachers actively evaluate pupils' progress, accuracy and understanding throughout lessons. They circulate around the classroom and provide helpful feedback that helps nearly all pupils to improve their work. However, on a few occasions teachers intervene too quickly. This limits opportunities for pupils to problem solve, refine their thinking or learn from mistakes.

Teachers assess pupils' work regularly, including weekly scores which recognise endeavour and achievement, and summative assessments either at the end of topics or as part of a biannual programme of assessment. Leaders, alongside teachers, are building effective approaches to analysing this assessment information and beginning to use it effectively to monitor the progress of individuals and to implement 'catch up' or 'go ahead' plans to support or accelerate learning where needed.

Learning: pupil outcomes

In recent years, nearly all pupils gain entry to their school of choice at the end of Form VII.

Across the school, pupils' oracy skills are highly developed. From a young age, pupils engage enthusiastically with visitors, communicating clearly and responding appropriately to questions. As they move through the school, pupils gain in confidence. This is particularly evident within dramatic performances or within meetings of pupil leaders.

By the time they leave the school, most pupils are articulate and know how to adjust their speech to the audience, for example, adding atmosphere to texts when they are reading aloud in class or acting out a scenario of putting yourself in other people's shoes.

Youngest pupils, due to the way learning is designed and organised, develop personal independence rapidly. They confidently collect and manage their resources and organise the space in which they are working well.

During their time at the school, pupils make strong progress in reading and spelling, supported by regular assessments and targeted phonics and literacy activities. Younger pupils develop secure phonic knowledge and begin to read unfamiliar words with confidence, while older pupils read fluently and apply strategies such as prediction, summarising and sequencing when working with a range of texts.

Across the school, pupils' work is consistently well presented, and the development of pupils' handwriting is a strength. Aligned with the importance placed upon writing at the school, pupils' writing abilities and skills develop rapidly. As they start the school pupils develop their pencil control by tracing single letters, this swiftly moves to tracing single words and simple sentences. In Form II pupils develop their writing skills further writing short sentences, mainly accurately to describe what they did during half term and write interesting, personalised accounts of Bonfire night when 'the rockets are shooting high in the sky'. By Form III, pupils accurately complete comprehension activities and begin to develop their letter writing skills, with a letter from Horrid Henry to Perfect Peter. When given the opportunity to write more extended pieces, pupils demonstrate creativity and effective use of descriptive vocabulary such as describing themselves in 'Growing Up'.

From Form IV upwards, having graduated to using fountain pens and cursive script, pupils' ability to write accurate concise answers to questions develops rapidly as this is a central component of nearly all learning activities. When given the opportunity, for example when writing a letter to a relative about a trip to the zoo, pupils descriptions and vocabulary make their letters highly engaging. By the time they reach the top of the school, pupils demonstrate a range of successful writing skills in response to a wide range of genres. For example, when forming arguments concerning the merits of mobile phones or writing a pamphlet on Morocco's climate, economy and culture.

Across other areas of the curriculum, many pupils make strong progress in developing relevant subject specific skills. For example, in mathematics most pupils work at or above age expected levels. Further, pupils demonstrate well developed experimental skills within science, handling equipment responsibly and using microscopes to identify parts of tulips. Across the school, pupils confidently use digital devices and technologies to support their learning.

Further, specific digital skills such as coding and using software to manipulate and present data develop securely. For example, in Form V, pupils program mobile small 'micro processors' to count their steps when walking.

Pupils' application of skills and knowledge across the curriculum is a strength. Further, pupils' creative, physical and musical skills are also highly developed. For example, in art, pupils design and create imaginative posters to promote the 'Dig for Victory' campaign during the second world war. They perform confidently in music and drama and

participate enthusiastically in physical education and extracurricular sports. Pupils' singing in assemblies, services in the local cathedral and in school productions are a particular strength, from Form II upwards, all pupils learn to read music and play the recorder alongside opportunities to play a range of other instruments.

Friendship, ambition and discovery:

As a result of Fairholme Prep's safe, nurturing environment and ethos, pupils greatly enjoy their time at the school and nearly all develop as confident, assured young people. They feel safe at school and respected and valued by all members of the school community. The individual attention received by pupils, and the highly effective working relationships that are built by staff are key strengths of provision. Pupils and parents feel known, and trust that the school acts in their best interests.

Pupils are provided with a range of curricular and enrichment opportunities to develop their understanding and appreciation of different cultures and faiths. For example, recognising international thinking day and celebrating St. David's Day or Chinese New Year. Pupils learn about important institutions, for example parliament, through 'mock election campaigns' where pupils write and pitch their manifesto to the school and parents before an election is held and a group elected.

Pupils are extremely proud of their leadership roles and enjoy representing their peers at weekly School Council meetings, whole school events and events involving parents and the wider community. Among pupil leaders, there are head pupils, captains for sports, arts, drama and music, a school ambassador and a librarian. These leaders actively promote forthcoming events, create publicity literature, both by hand and digitally, and provide support for staff in leading and organising events. For example, pupils give tours of the school to prospective parents on open days and create notifications on the school's electronic communication system to promote events. Pupil leaders drive charitable events such as sending Christmas cards to local care homes or through 'Fitness Friday' where pupils collectively walked 50 kilometres to support those less fortunate.

Safeguarding:

Safeguarding procedures, including safer recruitment processes and maintaining the required records of staff checks, are robust. Staff receive regular training to support their safeguarding responsibilities, and everyone understands they have a role to play in safeguarding pupils. Staff are aware of their responsibilities, and any concerns are reported in a timely manner including to external agencies when necessary. In addition, wider aspects of safeguarding such as site security are very thorough.

Vision and leadership:

The principal, who is also the proprietor, has embedded a well understood vision for the school: 'learning, friendship, ambition and discovery'. The principal and their staff are united in supporting the achievement of strong academic outcomes within a supportive family environment where, pupils' leadership qualities are developed and curiosity and intellectual discovery are encouraged.

Leaders have a suitable understanding of the strengths and areas for development across the school. For example, subject leaders complete helpful evaluations of the provision and delivery of their subject based on learning walks and book scrutiny and the principal supplements this with useful annual learning walks and scrutiny of pupil outcomes. As a result of these activities, the principal identifies key improvement priorities and shares these with staff. However, quality assurance activities do not always identify where, in a few areas of the school's work, discrepancies between policy and practice have arisen or address where school improvement priorities are taking longer than anticipated to embed. In addition, during the inspection issues relating to the strengthening of policies to reflect changes to Welsh legislation and current school practice were raised with the school. These were successfully addressed.

Leaders provide staff with worthwhile opportunities to engage in professional learning which is aligned strongly to individual staff development needs. These needs are identified during the annual appraisal meeting with the principal. For example, staff have undertaken recent training on meeting the needs of neurodivergent learners.

Leaders have built and maintain outstanding relationships with parents. Parents express highly positive views about the school, consistently praising its inclusive, caring ethos. Nearly all parents believe the school enables every pupil to thrive academically, linking success to the high levels of individual attention pupils receive and staff's strong knowledge of each child. Communication is also regarded as a strength. Parents feel well-informed through prompt contact with staff and the use of the virtual learning environment, which provides instant updates and clear curriculum information. This helps parents feel closely involved in their children's academic and pastoral lives.

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.

Safeguarding

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

Recommendations

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

- R1 Strengthen self-evaluation and improvement planning so that leaders monitor teaching more rigorously and measure the impact of improvement priorities
- R2 Ensure that teaching consistently provides pupils with opportunities to think independently, make choices in their learning and develop problem-solving skills
- R3 Ensure school practice and policy are aligned with Welsh Government legislation and guidance

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

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:

Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

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