

Ysgol Penmaes
Canal Road
Brecon
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23/03/2026

Dear leaders and staff

Interim visit: March 2026

Dear Angharad Bryn-Jones

A team of inspectors lead by Huw Davies HMI, recently visited Ysgol Penmaes to consider how the school has made progress in addressing two of the recommendations from its core inspection in January 2024.

During the visit we had the opportunity to:

- meet with pupils, the senior and middle leadership team
- undertake learning walks at the two sites and
- scrutinise school documentation

Focus of visit

Ensure that planning and teaching takes sufficient account of the needs and abilities of pupils and builds effectively on prior learning

The school has established a clear vision for improving teaching and learning that reflects the needs of pupils. This vision emphasises the role of enabling adults, alongside meaningful learning experiences and effective learning environments. Improving teaching and learning remains a central priority within the school development plan. Leaders have introduced a structured improvement process that links staff audits, identified areas for improvement, professional learning, revised planning documentation and monitoring activities.

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Since the core inspection, leadership capacity has strengthened. Senior leaders have refined roles and responsibilities to provide clearer oversight of the curriculum and personalised planning across phases. The introduction of additional leadership responsibilities for areas of learning and experience has begun to strengthen curriculum oversight and professional dialogue, particularly through progression meetings. However, several leadership appointments are recent, and it is too early to judge their full impact on improving classroom practice and pupil outcomes.

Leaders have adapted the curriculum thoughtfully to meet the needs of pupils, most of whom are working at early stages of learning. Developmental pathways provide a suitable structure for supporting communication, exploration, belonging, physical development and well-being. Learning experiences increasingly prioritise engagement, sensory regulation and readiness for learning. As pupils progress, the curriculum places greater emphasis on structured learning, functional skills and preparation for adulthood, including opportunities for accreditation through Entry Pathways and ASDAN qualifications.

Planning systems have been revised to clarify learning experiences and staff are increasingly using medium-term planning across areas of learning and experience. Leaders are encouraging a shift away from overly adult-directed approaches towards more experiential learning within established learning environments. Staff report greater clarity about expectations and are beginning to apply a more consistent pedagogical approach. However, planning does not yet consistently map progression with sufficient precision or demonstrate clearly how learning builds systematically on prior learning.

Assessment systems are developing appropriately. Strengthened tracking arrangements and the introduction of an electronic evidence system support teachers and leaders to review pupils' progress and identify next steps in learning. These systems provide a clearer structure for professional reflection at class and whole-school level. However, they are still developing and there is limited evidence to demonstrate sustained and accelerated progress over time.

Personalised planning is increasingly embedded. Nearly all pupils have detailed profiles and regularly reviewed Individual Development Plans that identify curriculum targets, developmental goals and strategies to support regulation. Staff generally use assessment information appropriately to build on pupils' emerging skills. However, the quality of targets remains variable, and they are not always sufficiently precise or measurable to demonstrate clearly the impact of provision on pupil outcomes.

Inspectors' observations show that teaching is generally purposeful and adapted to pupils' needs. Staff provide clear explanations, model tasks carefully and promote active participation in practical activities. Strong relationships and nurturing environments

support high levels of engagement. However, the level of challenge and pace of learning vary between classes, and teaching does not yet consistently build on prior learning well enough to ensure that pupils make the strongest possible progress from their starting points.

Overall, leaders have strengthened leadership structures and begun to improve curriculum planning, assessment and professional learning. Although there is greater coherence in systems than previously, improvements are not yet sufficiently embedded to ensure that planning and teaching consistently take sufficient account of pupils' needs and abilities or build systematically on their prior learning. As a result, pupils do not always make the strongest possible progress from their starting points.

The school may wish to consider:

- That planning at all levels clearly identifies precise next steps, consistently builds on prior learning and demonstrates measurable impact on pupil progress over time.

Ensure that self-evaluation and improvement planning for curriculum design and, assessment, focus clearly on improving teaching and learning

Leaders have strengthened self-evaluation and improvement planning processes since the core inspection, with a clear focus on improving teaching and learning. The school development plan identifies teaching and learning as a central priority and leaders have introduced more structured arrangements to monitor and evaluate practice. These include a whole-school tracking system, teaching practices regular pupil progress meetings and a quality assurance calendar that links monitoring activities to improvement priorities.

Leaders increasingly use self-evaluation findings to review classroom practice and identify areas for improvement. Individual meetings with teachers help leaders discuss teaching approaches, behaviour support strategies and the role of enabling adults in supporting pupils' engagement. These discussions are beginning to strengthen professional reflection and support staff to refine their practice.

Assessment information is used increasingly well to inform self-evaluation. Leaders analyse tracking data, engagement measures and behaviour records to develop a clearer understanding of pupils' progress and barriers to learning. Information from data packs and electronic recording systems helps leaders identify patterns in engagement, behaviour and progress and informs decisions about teaching approaches and the deployment of support.

Leaders have also introduced initiatives intended to strengthen consistency in teaching practice. For example, the development of the pupil engagement team model aims to

improve staff understanding of behaviour strategies and provide clearer modelling of effective approaches in classrooms. However, this work is at an early stage, and it is too soon to evaluate its impact on teaching and pupil outcomes.

The school has introduced a Teaching and Learning Observation Framework to support more systematic evaluation of classroom practice. The framework emphasises emotionally secure learning environments, effective communication strategies, purposeful use of visual supports and responsive teaching by enabling adults. Leaders use this framework alongside the Penmaes Assessment Tool and teaching and learning rubric to structure professional dialogue during progression meetings.

These processes are beginning to strengthen professional discussion about teaching and learning. Leaders and staff increasingly draw on evidence from assessment information, observations and pupil progress meetings to review practice and identify priorities for improvement. However, while monitoring arrangements are more systematic than previously, leaders do not yet consistently demonstrate how these processes lead to sustained improvements in teaching quality or measurable gains in pupil progress.

Overall, self-evaluation and improvement planning are increasingly systematic and appropriately focused on teaching and learning. Leaders demonstrate a reflective and proactive approach to reviewing practice. However, evaluation of impact remains underdeveloped, and leaders are not yet able to demonstrate clearly how improvement activity is translating into sustained improvements in pupils' academic or developmental outcomes over time.

The school may wish to

- Strengthen how the school evaluates the impact of its provision on pupils' progress and longer-term outcomes, including curriculum and assessment changes, the consistency and quality of teaching, and how effectively 14–19 pathways and behaviour strategies support different groups of learners.

The inspection team would like to thank pupils and staff for their warm welcome.

The school's/PRU's latest core inspection report and further information on the process and purpose of interim visits can be found on our website:

<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/provider/6667004>

Yours sincerely



Dyfrig Ellis

Assistant Director