

**A report on**  
**Ysgol Maes Hyfryd Special School**

**Fifth Avenue  
Flint  
Flintshire  
Flint  
CH6 5QL**

**Date of inspection: May 2026**

**by**

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

## About Ysgol Maes Hyfryd Special School

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Name of provider                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Ysgol Maes Hyfryd Special School |
| Local authority                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Flintshire County Council        |
| Language of the provider                                                                                                                                                                                          | English                          |
| School category according to Welsh-medium provision                                                                                                                                                               |                                  |
| Type of school                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Maintained Special               |
| Religious character                                                                                                                                                                                               | *                                |
| Number of pupils on roll                                                                                                                                                                                          | 131                              |
| Pupils of statutory school age                                                                                                                                                                                    | 83                               |
| Number in nursery classes                                                                                                                                                                                         | 0                                |
| 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 Maintained Special Schools is 45.8%) | 40.4%                            |
| Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Maintained Special Schools is 100.0%)              | 100.0%                           |
| Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home                                                                                                                                                                      | *                                |
| Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language                                                                                                                                                       | *                                |
| Lead partner for Initial teacher education                                                                                                                                                                        | No                               |
| Date of headteacher appointment                                                                                                                                                                                   | 01/06/2013                       |
| Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)                                                                                                                                                                 | 31/10/2018                       |

|                          |            |
|--------------------------|------------|
| Start date of inspection | 11/05/2026 |
|--------------------------|------------|

### Further information

Ysgol Maes Hyfryd is a day special school situated across two sites in Flintshire and maintained by the local authority. The school provides education for pupils aged 11 to 19. There are currently 131 pupils on roll, an increase of 28% since the last inspection in 2018. Nearly all pupils are from Flintshire and a very few are from Wrexham, Denbighshire, Tameside and West Cheshire.

The post-16 provision operates from a satellite provision of the school.

All pupils have identified additional learning needs. Just over half of pupils have individual development plans (IDP) that are maintained by the local authority and just under half have a school-maintained IDP. A very few pupils have an education and health care plans (EHCP).

The school supports pupils with a wide range of additional learning needs. Most pupils have severe learning difficulties. Many pupils are autistic and around half of pupils have speech, language and communication difficulties. A minority of pupils have physical and medical difficulties or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. A few pupils have profound and multiple learning difficulties or sensory impairments, including hearing or visual impairment.

Most pupils are of white British background. A very small minority of pupils are from other ethnic backgrounds.

The school employs 15 full-time equivalent teachers and 60 support staff. There are 14 classes.

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

The school is a calm, caring and welcoming place where pupils feel safe, respected and valued. The headteacher, her staff and governors work together well to create a positive environment that helps pupils build confidence, independence and important life skills. Staff know pupils extremely well and provide highly personalised support to meet their different needs. Relationships between staff and pupils are a particular strength of the school.

The curriculum is designed carefully to prepare pupils for adulthood. Pupils learn important communication, literacy, numeracy and independence skills through practical and meaningful activities. For example, pupils take part in shopping, cooking, enterprise projects and travel training. Older pupils benefit from valuable work experience opportunities in places such as cafés, farms and local schools. The school's travel training programme is especially strong and helps many pupils learn to travel safely and independently in the community.

Teachers and support staff provide purposeful and engaging lessons. They use practical, sensory and visual activities effectively to help pupils understand and remember their learning. Pupils benefit from calm routines, strong support and activities matched carefully to their needs. In a few lessons, however, activities are not adapted closely enough or rely too much on worksheets, which slow pupils' progress.

Nearly all pupils show positive attitudes to learning and behave well. Pupils are kind and respectful to each other and to adults. Many pupils develop strong social skills and learn how to keep themselves safe, including online. The school teaches relationships and sexuality education thoughtfully and sensitively to help pupils understand friendships, consent, personal safety and healthy relationships.

The school provides many opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and contribute to the wider community. Pupils take part in leadership groups, community events and local projects confidently. They are proud of their school and enjoy helping others.

Leaders provide strong and caring leadership and have created an inclusive culture where pupils' well-being and progress are central to the school's work. Governors support the school well and leaders use funding carefully to improve learning, safeguarding and support for families. Leaders know the school's strengths and areas for improvement, although improvement planning does not always focus sharply enough on measuring the impact of changes on pupils' progress and well-being.

## **Recommendations**

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

- R1      Ensure that all policies are updated to reflect local and national guidance
- R2      Continue to develop improvement planning and ensure an appropriate focus on expected outcomes and impact on pupils

## **What happens next**

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

## **Main evaluation**

### **A Calm, Caring and Aspirational School Culture**

The headteacher, supported effectively by governors and staff, has established and sustained a highly structured, nurturing and inclusive culture that reflects a deep understanding of pupils' wide-ranging and complex needs. Through a clear strategic vision, leaders have ensured that well-defined curriculum pathways and highly personalised approaches to teaching and support create a calm and purposeful environment where pupils feel safe, respected and valued. Leaders promote high expectations for relationships and care across the school successfully. As a result, staff develop consistently positive relationships with pupils and place a strong emphasis on developing pupils' independence, communication and life skills progressively as they move through the school.

This shared commitment to preparing pupils for adulthood is evident throughout the school's work. Where appropriate, pupils progress from developing early communication and self-help skills to engaging in vocational learning, travel training and work experience in the sixth form. Across the school, pupils demonstrate respect for others and strong awareness of the wider community, such as speaking quietly in shared areas and showing consideration for peers' needs. This culture contributes strongly to pupils' confidence, resilience, behaviour and sense of belonging.

### **Developing Independence and Leadership Through the Curriculum**

The school provides a highly personalised curriculum that supports pupils to develop independence, communication and employability skills progressively throughout their time in school. Curriculum pathways reflect pupils' additional learning needs well and place a strong emphasis on applying learning in meaningful real-life contexts. As a result, many pupils develop confidence, resilience and important life skills successfully.

Across the school, pupils benefit from purposeful opportunities to apply their learning through enterprise activities, volunteering, travel training and independent living experiences. These experiences help pupils strengthen their communication, numeracy and social skills while developing increasing independence and self-confidence. In the sixth form, collaboration with the local college enhances post-16 provision effectively and supports pupils' transition planning well. For example, older pupils build successfully on skills developed lower down the school through work-related learning and community-based experiences.

Pupil leadership is a notable strength of the school and contributes meaningfully to pupils' personal development and the wider life of the school. Through roles such as the school

council, Criw Cymraeg and participation in local authority forums, pupils develop communication, decision-making and collaboration skills effectively. Many pupils speak confidently about how their views influence aspects of school life, including playground developments, recycling initiatives and contributions to community projects.

The curriculum provides a broad range of enriching community experiences that strengthen pupils' sense of belonging and responsibility. Residential visits, community events and enterprise activities, such as selling baked goods and crafts, help pupils develop empathy, confidence and employability skills well. For many pupils, residential experiences provide valuable opportunities to develop independence away from home for the first time. These experiences reflect the school's strong commitment to inclusion, preparation for adulthood and ensuring that pupils become active contributors within their local community.

### **Spotlight: Thoughtful Delivery of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)**

RSE is delivered thoughtfully and sensitively to meet the diverse needs of pupils. Pupils develop important knowledge and skills that help them understand how to keep themselves safe online, build positive relationships and recognise kindness, consent and respectful behaviour.

Pupils contribute meaningfully to shaping the curriculum in this area, ensuring learning is relevant and engaging.

Across the school, pupils explore themes such as safe and unsafe relationships, identifying trusted adults, understanding friendships, recognising their own strengths and developing awareness of changes associated with puberty and growing up.

Where appropriate, RSE is delivered through a highly personalised approach rather than discrete lessons, reflecting individual learning and communication needs. Staff carefully embed learning through everyday routines and supportive interactions, including personal care. This helps pupils develop understanding of personal boundaries, private spaces, emotional changes and body awareness in ways that are appropriate, respectful and responsive to their needs.

### **Purposeful and Nurturing Teaching that Supports Engagement and Progression**

Across the school, teachers and support staff demonstrate a secure understanding of pupils' individual needs. Positive relationships between staff and pupils are a notable strength and contribute significantly to the calm and purposeful learning environment across the school. Teaching assistants provide highly effective support and contribute positively to pupils' progress and well-being. They monitor pupils' engagement carefully,

reinforce learning consistently and provide sensitive support for pupils requiring sensory regulation or specialist physical assistance.

In most cases effective teaching includes:

- clear sequences of learning that align closely with pupils' individual learning goals and curriculum pathways
- calm, structured and nurturing learning environments that help pupils feel safe, regulated and ready to learn
- practical, sensory and visual approaches, including symbols, objects of reference, digital resources and sensory activities, to reinforce understanding and sustain engagement
- purposeful opportunities for pupils to apply literacy, numeracy and independence skills in authentic contexts, such as shopping, enterprise activities, meal preparation and travel training
- effective questioning, repetition and appropriate processing time to support pupils to recall prior learning, strengthen communication skills and build confidence in expressing themselves
- sensitive adaptation of support to meet pupils' communication, sensory and physical needs, helping to maintain participation and engagement in learning
- strong collaboration between teachers and support staff to ensure that pupils' engagement is monitored carefully and learning is reinforced consistently
- practical investigations and sensory-based activities that develop pupils' vocabulary, prediction and reasoning skills well
- real-life numeracy activities involving money, menus and shopping lists, enabling pupils to apply mathematical skills meaningfully
- discussion-based activities that help pupils develop a stronger understanding of relationships, consent, online safety and emotional well-being
- structured sensory regulation approaches and low-demand environments that support pupils to regulate successfully and re-engage positively in learning.

In a few lessons teaching is less effective because; activities that are not matched closely enough to pupils' levels of understanding or communication needs; learning tasks rely too heavily on worksheet-based activities and limit opportunities for practical engagement or independent application of skills; there are missed opportunities to address misconceptions or provide immediate corrective feedback during lessons; occasional inconsistencies in classroom routines or transitions that result in pupils becoming unsettled or disengaged temporarily and, learning activities lack pace are too slow or where challenge is not adapted appropriately for pupils' abilities.



## **Strong Development of Literacy, Numeracy and Communication Skills**

Many pupils make secure progress from their individual starting points and develop important literacy, communication and numeracy skills successfully over time. Pupils develop vocabulary, reading and early writing skills appropriately through engaging activities such as storytelling, drama and creative writing. For example, pupils create storyboards to retell parts of *Macbeth* and use descriptive vocabulary confidently. In creative writing lessons, a few pupils confidently define and appropriately use subject-specific vocabulary such as “curious”, “rationing” and “aftermath”.

Nearly all pupils communicate effectively relative to their needs, using communication aids purposefully to express themselves and engage in learning. Many pupils develop speaking and listening skills well through collaborative discussion activities.

Many pupils apply numeracy skills successfully through practical and authentic learning experiences such as budgeting, shopping and enterprise activities. For example, pupils involved in the school’s car wash enterprise gather booking information, manage payments and evaluate customer feedback.

Most pupils make suitable progress in developing digital skills, ranging from early cause-and-effect understanding to independent use of Hwb accounts and assistive technology.

## **Highly Effective Preparation for Independence and Adult Life**

The school’s work in developing pupils’ independence and life skills is a significant strength. Pupils benefit from carefully planned opportunities to develop self-help, social, employability and travel skills through meaningful real-world experiences. Daily routines help pupils develop independence in personal organisation, self-care and social interaction successfully. For example, many pupils independently prepare snacks, clear dishes and organise their belongings during the school day.

The sixth form provides particularly strong opportunities for work experience, volunteering and vocational learning. Work placements are matched thoughtfully to pupils’ needs and abilities and help prepare them successfully for adulthood. Older pupils access a broad range of placements, including farms, cafés, shops and local schools. The ‘Outside Lives’ provision is particularly effective in promoting inclusion and belonging by enabling more able pupils to prepare experiences for peers with more complex needs.

### **Travel Training as a Standout Strength**

The school's travel training programme is a standout strength of the sixth form provision, demonstrating a clear, consistent commitment to preparing pupils for greater independence and participation in their communities. The programme which is a legacy of a much-respected member of staff, is exceptionally well-structured and carefully tailored to meet the wide-ranging needs of learners.

Most pupils develop strong practical skills through carefully planned, real-world experiences that build confidence, resilience, and decision-making. As a result, many pupils make significant progress in their ability to navigate routes safely, understand travel routines, and manage unexpected situations. The impact of this provision is evident not only within school but beyond it: pupils successfully transfer these skills into their personal lives, increasing their independence and enabling them to travel to and from school with greater confidence.

This highly effective programme plays a vital role in enhancing pupils' life chances. It equips them with essential life skills, promotes autonomy, and empowers them to engage more fully with their communities. The consistency of outcomes across the sixth form reflects the expertise of staff and the school's unwavering focus on meaningful, real-life preparation for adulthood.

### **Respect and Well-Being**

Nearly all pupils demonstrate highly positive attitudes to learning and treat staff and peers with respect and kindness. Strong relationships with trusted adults help pupils feel safe, secure and motivated to attend school. Pupils develop increasing awareness of relationships, online safety and the needs of others. A few more able pupils explain clearly the dangers of coercive control and understand risks associated with online platforms.

Older pupils, in particular, show maturity and responsibility in supporting peers and contribute positively to the wider school community. Most pupils enjoy school greatly, speak positively about their experiences and take pride in representing the school.

Attendance and behaviour are strong overall, although a very small number of pupils with complex placement needs affect attendance data disproportionately.

The school works very effectively with families and external agencies to support pupils' learning, well-being and transition planning. The school has effective and well-established transition arrangements that support pupils moving from feeder schools successfully. Transition activities are planned carefully around pupils' individual needs and help pupils become familiar with the school environment, routines and key staff. During a visit observed by inspectors, nearly all pupils were relaxed, happy and engaged positively

during the visit, demonstrating growing confidence and readiness for transition. Transition planning and destination support for older pupils are robust and help ensure pupils move successfully into college, volunteering or specialist provision.

The family engagement worker has established strong relationships with parents and provides valuable support and training opportunities. Multi-disciplinary collaboration is a notable strength of the school's work and contributes positively to pupils' wellbeing.

### **Learning Environments that Support Engagement and Regulation**

The school provides highly engaging and thoughtfully designed learning environments that support pupils' readiness to learn successfully. Indoor and outdoor spaces are well resourced and include sensory areas, regulation spaces, trampolines, gardening areas and independent living facilities.

These environments support pupils effectively in developing physical coordination, sensory regulation, confidence and independence. For example, outdoor climbing equipment and sensory gardens help pupils develop balance, coordination and emotional regulation successfully. Staff adapt resources carefully to ensure pupils with physical and visual needs can access learning alongside their peers equitably.

### **Highly Effective Leadership with a Strong Inclusive Vision**

The headteacher has responded flexibly to periods of significant staffing change and increasing pupil complexity. The recent restructuring of leadership responsibilities has strengthened the strategic focus of senior leaders and developed the role of middle leaders. These have contributed to an open and supportive leadership culture. Most staff recognise the school's strategic direction clearly and value the school's ethos. Staff morale is generally positive overall.

Leaders provide clear strategic direction, particularly in curriculum development, assessment and post-16 provision, and have developed highly personalised approaches that reflect pupils' individual needs well. A notable strength is leaders' willingness to adapt curriculum and assessment arrangements thoughtfully to meet the needs of pupils, rather than relying solely on prescribed progression structures.

Senior leaders monitor teaching and learning carefully through quality assurance activities, professional dialogue and performance management processes. Professional learning aligns closely with school priorities and supports staff to develop specialist expertise successfully in areas such as communication, behaviour, autism and safeguarding. Leaders have also strengthened induction and career development opportunities effectively through partnerships with universities and colleges.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning processes are developing appropriately. Leaders and governors demonstrate honesty in identifying areas for improvement and gather stakeholder views regularly. However, improvement planning focuses too heavily on actions rather than measurable impact on pupils' outcomes and well-being. Communication with parents and aspects of safeguarding practice, including policy, are not addressed sharply enough within improvement planning.

### **Governors and secure financial oversight**

Governors demonstrate a strong commitment to the school and understand the needs of pupils and families well. They provide supportive challenge and are increasingly involved in first-hand monitoring activities. Governors have a secure understanding of safeguarding, finance and school priorities and use information appropriately to support decision-making. However, governance is currently stronger in support than in evaluative challenge, and governors do not always evaluate the impact of initiatives sharply enough over time.

Leaders and governors manage finances carefully and deploy resources purposefully to support safeguarding, digital learning and provision for pupils with increasingly complex needs. Grant funding is used effectively to support family engagement and reduce the impact of disadvantage. As a result, many pupils and families benefit from a caring and inclusive school community where barriers to learning and well-being are reduced successfully.

### **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 manage the school's finances appropriately, including the use of the pupil development grant.

## **Evidence base of the report**

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carers 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/carers 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, to listen to them read 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 a broad sample of classes, 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 ([www.estyn.gov.wales](http://www.estyn.gov.wales))

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

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