

Meadowbank Special School
Colwill Rd
Gabalfa
Cardiff
CF14 2QQ

01/07/2026

Dear leaders and staff

Interim visit: June 2026

A team of inspectors lead by Huw Davies HMI, recently visited Meadowbank School to consider how the school has made progress in addressing two of the recommendations from its core inspection in 2019.

During the visit we had the opportunity to:

- undertake learning walks and talk to pupils and staff
- meet with the senior leadership team
- have discussions with parent governors, and
- scrutinise school documentation

Context

Since the core inspection in 2019, the school has experienced exceptional growth, with pupil numbers raising from 33 to 112, an increase of 240%, alongside significant expansion in staffing and accommodation. Despite the challenges associated with this rapid development, leaders have maintained a clear strategic direction and a strong focus on meeting the needs of pupils with autism and/or learning needs. Additional accommodation has increased capacity and improved access to specialist provision. However, aspects of the original building remain less well suited to pupils' needs. In particular, vaulted ceilings and the need to move through classrooms to access other areas create sensory distractions and interruptions to learning for pupils with autism and associated sensory processing difficulties.

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Estyn welcomes correspondence in both English and Welsh. Correspondence received in either language will be given equal priority.

A notable strength of the school is the resilience, determination and commitment of the headteacher, whose vision has underpinned the school's successful development. She has ensured that the school, its leaders and staff have established a shared culture based on the school's values and promises, sustaining a nurturing and inclusive ethos during a period of considerable change.

Distributed leadership has strengthened leadership capacity and enabled staff to take responsibility for key areas of improvement. Leaders and staff demonstrate a secure understanding of child development and relevant developmental milestones, which informs curriculum planning, assessment and support effectively.

The headteacher and her staff have created a warm, inclusive and aspirational community where pupils, families and staff share a strong sense of belonging. This culture was evident during the visit and exemplified by the school's sports day, which brought together pupils, parents and staff in a celebration of participation, achievement and community spirit. Despite persistent rain, pupils participated eagerly in a wide range of activities, supported by staff and encouraged by their families. The event reflected the school's commitment to ensuring that all pupils experience success in meaningful ways. Activities supported physical skills such as balance, coordination, agility and motor control, while also fostering confidence, resilience, turn-taking, following instructions and encouragement of others.

Focus of visit

Strengthening curriculum planning to ensure that it builds on the skills of all pupils

Since the time of the core inspection in 2019, the headteacher, leaders and staff have made important improvements to the curriculum. Leaders have developed a curriculum that is broad and balanced and reflects the individual needs, interests and abilities of its pupils while aligning closely with the principles and expectations of the Curriculum for Wales. The curriculum is designed to be meaningful, engaging, and developmentally appropriate, helping to foster curiosity, and enjoyment.

The curriculum is organised into five developmental pathways: Belonging, Communication, Exploration, Physical Development and Well-being. Staff use these pathways effectively to support pupils' progress and development, ensuring that learning experiences are tailored appropriately and build on pupils' prior achievements.

They place a strong emphasis on developing pupils' communication skills, emotional well-being and physical development.

Discussions with parent governors highlight the school's positive impact on pupils' communication, confidence and social development. Parents value the strong partnership between home and school, including collaborative target-setting and regular communication. They feel that leaders have developed a thoughtful curriculum that meets pupils' needs well. Weekly coffee mornings and an online parent forum help foster a supportive community.

Leaders have strengthened the therapeutic curriculum by providing targeted interventions such as music and play therapy. These experiences support pupils' emotional well-being, communication and self-regulation. Over time pupils express their feelings, build positive relationships and increasingly develop their confidence. Leaders' use well-being data suitably to evaluate impact, helping to improve pupils' well-being, engagement and readiness to learn.

The school effectively promotes its Welsh identity through everyday learning and enrichment activities, integrating Welsh language and culture into school life. It also provides meaningful opportunities for pupils to explore diversity, inclusion, and different cultures, helping them develop respect for others and a growing awareness of the wider world.

Leaders have developed a beneficial approach to strengthening the curriculum and improving provision across the school. They have identified two Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE) leads for each curriculum area, providing clear accountability for overseeing curriculum development and delivery. AoLE leads have undertaken audits of practice within their areas to evaluate current strengths and identify priorities for improvement. In response, they have produced beneficial action plans that are supported and monitored by the senior leadership team. These plans are shared with staff and reviewed regularly to ensure that planned improvements are implemented effectively and have a positive impact on pupils' experiences.

Leaders have provided effective professional learning to enhance staff understanding of curriculum developments. For example, staff have benefited from professional development in early play skills, modelling mathematical concepts and developing fine motor skills.

Leaders have promoted collaboration and consistency through internal teaching and learning cluster working. Cluster teachers meet weekly to co-plan learning experiences, share effective practice and refine approaches to teaching and learning. In addition, leaders ensure that assessment information is shared and used effectively.

This enables staff to identify trends, monitor pupil progress and respond appropriately to emerging needs.

To further strengthen provision, leaders have established a range of Champion Roles for teaching assistants, assigning responsibilities to staff according to their expertise, experience and interests. Champion Role leads have developed action plans that are supported and monitored by senior leaders and shared with staff to ensure collective ownership. Leaders have also delivered professional learning opportunities to enhance staff understanding of developments within each Champion Role area and support consistent implementation across the school.

The development of assessment systems to track the progress that pupils make

The school has established a thoughtful and increasingly coherent approach to assessment that reflects a strong commitment to understanding and recognising pupils' progress. Leaders have developed a range of tools and processes to capture small but meaningful steps in learning and development and are working to improve consistency across the school.

The school's planning and progression framework provides a clear structure for identifying and prioritising skills, linking these to meaningful learning objectives and progression pathways. It supports a personalised and inclusive approach to curriculum planning, placing learner progression at the centre while allowing flexibility to respond to individual needs and contexts.

The framework offers a comprehensive view of pupils' development over time, emphasising the incremental acquisition of knowledge, skills, understanding and learning behaviours across a broad range of developmental areas. A particular strength is its focus on observable learner behaviours, including increasing independence, resilience, engagement and confidence, which helps staff identify and recognise meaningful progress. By incorporating cognitive, emotional, social and physical development, the framework supports a holistic understanding of pupils' achievements and their growing capacity to engage successfully in different contexts.

The school's tracking systems complement this approach by providing staff and leaders with an overview of pupils' progress across areas such as belonging, well-being, physical development, communication and exploration. Colour-coded heat maps enable leaders to identify patterns and trends efficiently at individual and cohort level. Together with effective formative assessment practices, these arrangements provide a balanced picture

of pupils' development and support leaders' evaluation of outcomes across the school. The use of formative assessment in capturing the progress that pupils make is a particular strength.

Overall, the school has developed a well-considered framework for planning, assessment and tracking that provides a rich picture of pupils' progress and reflects a strong commitment to recognising development in its many forms. These arrangements provide a secure foundation for understanding and supporting pupil progression over time.

The school'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/6817021>

Yours sincerely



Dyfrig Ellis

Assistant Director