



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

**A report on**

**Eirias High School**

**Eirias Road  
Colwyn Bay  
Conwy  
LL29 7SP**

**Date of inspection: November 2022**

**by**

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

## About Eirias High School

Name of provider	Eirias High School
Local authority	Conwy County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	1293
Pupils of statutory school age	1063
Number in sixth form	231
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%)	15.7%
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%)	12.3%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	4.7%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	2.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2017
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/10/2014
Start date of inspection	28/11/2022

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](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.

## Overview

Ysgol Eirias is a caring and inclusive community which provides a welcoming environment for pupils, staff and visitors. Pupils' emotional health and well-being is a key priority, and this is promoted well through day-to-day activities and the school's pastoral care system. As a result, most pupils behave well and treat their peers and others with respect and care.

Leaders have successfully created a strong culture for safeguarding within the school and relationships between staff and pupils are positive. Consequently, most pupils feel safe at school, and that they would have a trusted adult to which they could turn to should they need support. The school works well with outside agencies to ensure that most pupils have returned to school following the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this work has not had sufficient impact on the attendance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals. Although the school has sound arrangements to safeguard pupils, a few health and safety matters were raised with the school during the inspection.

The school is well led by the headteacher and the senior leadership team. There are clear lines of accountability which ensure that leaders and staff take full responsibility for the impact of provision within their areas of responsibility. Governors take an active role in the leadership of the school and provide a good balance of support and challenge to leaders.

Leaders at all levels know the school well. They have a suitable understanding of the main strengths and areas for improvement, identify development priorities suitably, and plan well for improvement. However, leaders do not always evaluate the quality of the provision for skills precisely enough, by considering its impact on the standards of pupils' work.

The professional development of staff is a strength of the school. Leaders have built a culture of reflection within the school where staff regularly participate in valuable research and training activities to improve their practice. As a result, teaching is effective in many instances and this ensures that pupils make secure progress in their subject skills and knowledge. However, teachers' feedback to pupils is not precise enough and, too often, this does not support improvement in their work.

There are valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy skills, both within mathematics and in other relevant subjects. The school offers beneficial opportunities for pupils to develop their thinking skills, their physical skills and their creativity. However, in general, pupils do not have enough worthwhile opportunities to develop their advanced reading, extended writing and digital skills.

The school's curriculum builds well on pupils' prior learning and there is a wide range of courses available. The school offers a wide and varied range of extra-curricular trips and clubs, especially sports clubs, where rates of participation are particularly high. The sixth form contribute well to the life of the school, and pupils in the sixth form generally make strong progress.

## **Recommendations**

- R1 Improve provision for the progressive development of pupils' literacy and digital skills
- R2 Strengthen improvement processes so that they focus sharply on the impact of learning opportunities on the development of pupils' skills
- R3 Improve the quality and impact of assessment and feedback
- R4 Improve the attendance of pupils who are eligible for free school meals
- R5 Address the health and safety concerns shared with the school during the inspection

## **What happens next**

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

## Main evaluation

### Learning

In lessons, many pupils, including those with additional learning needs, make secure progress in their subject knowledge and understanding. They recall prior learning well, such as the main learning points of Pythagoras' Theorem, before using their knowledge to solve challenging problems set in real-life contexts. A few pupils make strong and rapid progress. However, a few pupils make only limited progress. This is due mainly to shortcomings in teaching.

Many pupils listen well to their teachers and peers. This helps them to understand what they are required to do, respond suitably to questions or build on the contributions of others. The few pupils who do not listen with sufficient attention miss instructions and information that would help them learn.

In many instances, pupils respond appropriately to their teacher's questions when, for example, interpreting images from World War 1 or sharing opinions about inclusion and tolerance. The majority of pupils use subject specific language appropriately, whether it be discussing their musical compositions or tactical changes in a football match. A few highly articulate pupils explain their reasoning or justify their choices confidently. They use a broad vocabulary adroitly, which enriches their speech, in contrast to a minority whose limited vocabulary occasionally makes it difficult for them to express themselves clearly. However, too often pupils provide brief underdeveloped responses that are not challenged by the teacher.

Beyond information retrieval, too few pupils use a sufficient range of reading strategies to support their learning in different subjects, though many enjoy reading for pleasure during their library lessons. Many can read a range of texts with secure understanding, for example linking images associated with The Great Depression to themes in 'Of Mice and Men'. Occasionally though their understanding is at a superficial level. A minority of pupils make good independent use of inference and deduction to, for example, support their understanding of poetry by Wilfred Owen or analyse historical sources about social conditions during industrialisation. Sixth form pupils provide thoughtful analyses of poetry such as Blake's 'The Little Black Boy', highlighting the use of religion to justify oppression in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Around half of pupils produce well-constructed and engaging narrative and persuasive writing, ranging from experiences on a zip wire to considered thoughts on racism. Generally, they use an appropriate and helpful vocabulary. However, the writing of a similar proportion of pupils occasionally lacks control or structure and they make too many basic errors. Very few pupils appear to take responsibility for improving the content and technical accuracy of their work before they hand it to the teacher.

In Welsh lessons, most pupils make secure progress in developing their understanding of the language. Nearly all use Welsh suitably when responding to the teacher's questions. Many expand their vocabulary, develop pronunciation and intonation well and communicate clearly in Welsh. However, in a few cases, pupils lack confidence in their Welsh language skills and respond in English rather than

Welsh. They are able to write short sentences in Welsh accurately and in the correct tense. Older pupils use a wide range of sentence structures to influence the reader with increasing confidence, for example when writing a blog to promote Wales as a holiday destination. However, too often pupils spell simple, everyday words incorrectly.

Many pupils have secure number skills. They use the four rules confidently and carry out accurate calculations with ratios, percentages and fractions. The majority of pupils apply their understanding successfully to solve worded and multi-step problems such as calculating the totals of domestic bills. A few pupils have weak basic number skills and struggle with basic number concepts. As a result, they struggle to apply their numeracy skills in new situations. Many pupils have a sound understanding of shapes and measures. They convert between different metric measures confidently and calculate areas and perimeters of compound shapes, including those that contain parts of circles, accurately. Many also analyse data successfully. In geography, for example, they evaluate the effect of birth and death rates on the populations of different countries. When drawing graphs, they choose scales appropriately and interpret the information sensibly to draw helpful conclusions.

In their information technology lessons, pupils develop their digital skills appropriately. This includes creating websites, using databases to categorise and display information and using a basic range of media to communicate with their audience. However, due to a lack of meaningful opportunities, pupils do not develop their digital skills across the curriculum well enough.

In general, pupils develop their thinking skills suitably. A few pupils use their understanding of various mathematical topics to solve challenging equations successfully. Many pupils develop their creative skills well. For example, in drama, they successfully create freeze frames to convey different emotions, and in their art lessons they consider the influences of different artists on their own approaches.

Pupils generally develop their physical skills well both within lessons and the extra-curricular activities that are on offer. In technology, Year 7 pupils demonstrate good hand to eye coordination when using a saw to cut wood safely. In their physical education lessons and clubs, pupils use well developed motor skills, such as when they pass a football skilfully in small-sided possession games.

Many sixth form pupils have secure recall of prior learning and make strong progress in their subject knowledge and skills. They have positive attitudes towards their learning and show a high degree of independence. Often, they also demonstrate strong literacy skills. They are articulate and use a broad, sophisticated vocabulary, such as when explaining how motivational theory can be applied to a business. These pupils also write fluently, for example when explaining the multiplier effect of a cash injection into the National Health Service on gross domestic product. They benefit from good numeracy and thinking skills, such as when they apply their understanding of geometric progressions to solve problems.

## **Well-being and attitudes to learning**

Many pupils enjoy school and say they are free from physical and verbal abuse. They are proud to be part of the Ysgol Eirias community. Most pupils feel safe in school and have a trusted adult to turn to if they have any problems. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe online.

Most pupils show respect and are courteous to their peers, staff and visitors. They are confident and willing to discuss their views on various aspects of school life. Many have positive working relationships with teachers. Nearly all pupils understand the school's rules and behaviour system, and most pupils behave well in corridors and around the school site.

Pupils develop their confidence well through their participation in the extensive extra-curricular provision. Many value the opportunities offered to them through this programme. There are high levels of regular participation within the activities such as music, creative and sports clubs. Many pupils understand how to make healthy lifestyle choices. For example, in health and well-being 'REACH' lessons, pupils discuss healthy meals and exercise, and the impact of these on their well-being.

A few pupils take on leadership opportunities at Ysgol Eirias. These pupils carry out their roles with enthusiasm and maturity and develop their personal and social skills successfully. The School Council has influenced teaching and learning through the 'Learning Provision Plan' by sharing their expectations of good learning experiences and how teachers provide support to meet their needs. Sixth form pupils benefit from opportunities to develop their leadership skills as prefects. Their roles include duties at lunchtime and volunteering in lower school classes, interventions or extra-curricular clubs.

The majority of pupils persevere at difficult tasks and devise suitable solutions when challenged. Many show tolerance and have a sound understanding and appreciation of other cultures and religions. They have a suitable awareness of fairness and equality which is supported by the LGBTQ+ 'Clwb Enfys' and the 'Diversity and Inclusivity' sub-committee of the school council.

Many pupils have positive attitudes to learning and engage well with their work. They arrive promptly to their sessions and are ready to learn. They settle quickly, behave well and collaborate in their learning. However, a very few pupils become distracted easily or lose concentration. In addition, a minority have incomplete work in their books or do not respond purposefully to their teachers' feedback to improve their work. Many sixth form pupils engage fully in their learning, sustaining concentration throughout the lessons.

While whole school attendance has improved overall when compared to the corresponding period of the last academic year, the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals is notably lower than for other pupils in the school.

## **Teaching and learning experiences**

Nearly all teachers at Ysgol Eirias foster caring and positive relationships, rooted in mutual respect, and know their pupils well. Most create a calm learning environment

in their classroom and manage behaviour effectively. They adopt useful daily routines to help pupils settle and remain engaged.

Many teachers plan meaningful activities and adapt them appropriately to the needs and interests of their pupils. In science, for example, work on electrical circuits is linked to Christmas light decorations. These teachers strike a suitable balance between teacher-led and pupil-led activities and provide clear explanations to help pupils' understanding. Most teachers circulate the classroom effectively and ask questions to individual pupils to check their understanding. They have high expectations and are encouraging, which helps pupils build confidence and contribute effectively to the lesson.

In a few cases where teaching is particularly effective, teachers plan the learning skilfully and demand the accurate use of subject terminology. They consistently set challenging work and have high expectations of all pupils. These teachers adopt highly effective questioning techniques to probe pupils' understanding and deepen their thinking. They adapt their planning in response to assessments and to the needs of pupils.

In a majority of cases, teachers model work effectively and produce high-quality resources, for example when presenting the features of a successful website design in digital technology. These teachers sequence tasks well which supports pupils to make secure progress. The majority of teachers use a combination of open and closed questions purposefully to ensure that pupils participate and to monitor their understanding. They provide frequent and effective verbal feedback.

The majority of teachers assess pupils' work accurately and provide suitable feedback. These teachers use diagnostic written comments to show pupils where there are strengths and areas for improvement. In a few cases, feedback leads to improvements in pupils' work. However, too often, written feedback does not provide pupils with a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve their work. Generally, teachers do not consistently mark for literacy or correct spelling and grammatical errors well enough.

In a minority of instances, teachers do not plan well enough to provide challenge to pupils of all abilities. They design tasks that are insufficiently demanding. For example, in a few cases, pupils are asked to copy from the board. These teachers do not use their subject expertise fully to inspire or enthuse their pupils. Their questioning techniques are not comprehensive enough, which limits the opportunities for pupils to embed new knowledge fully.

The school has suitable systems for tracking and monitoring pupils' progress and attitudes to learning. Reports to parents are regular and contain valuable information on performance, attendance and areas for improvement.

The school's curriculum builds suitably on pupils' prior learning from previous Key Stages. At Key Stage 4, the school offers a wide range of subject choices that meet the needs of nearly all pupils well. This includes vocational and academic courses, including additional mathematics, two modern foreign languages and travel and tourism. Specialised pathways such as marine engineering and digital creative media are offered through a beneficial partnership with the local college. The school works



well in partnership with other schools and colleges in the local authority to ensure that there is a very wide range of subjects available to pupils in the sixth form, including economics and construction.

The school has consulted with a wide range of stakeholders to develop a clear vision for the new curriculum. Leaders collaborate with partner secondary schools in the 'A55 alliance' and experimented suitably with different approaches as a pioneer school before adopting its curriculum for Year 7 in September 2022. Professional learning focuses appropriately on improving the quality of teaching alongside developing the new curriculum. Leaders work effectively with partner primary schools to ensure that learning opportunities for Year 7 pupils build suitably on what they experienced in the primary sector. Provision for the Curriculum for Wales focuses well on engaging pupils while simultaneously developing their subject knowledge and skills. In Year 7, the school is trialling a new approach to assessing progress and attitudes to learning.

In mathematics, there is strong provision to develop pupils' numeracy skills and in other relevant subjects, there is a suitable range of worthwhile opportunities for pupils to apply these skills in meaningful contexts. For example, in geography, Year 8 pupils develop their data-handling skills when drawing and interpreting population pyramids, population charts and climate graphs.

In digital literacy lessons, there are suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their digital skills. However, the provision to apply these skills across the curriculum is underdeveloped.

Currently, there are limited cross-curricular opportunities for pupils to develop their reading skills beyond information retrieval. More advanced reading skills such as synthesis, summary and evaluation are not developed well enough in meaningful contexts. Although many pupils benefit from writing in different forms, it is within a narrow range of subjects and for a limited range of audiences. Overall, there are insufficient worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop their extended writing skills. Interventions to support those pupils with weak basic literacy skills are limited.

The personal and social education (PSE) programme is wide-ranging and well planned. It makes good use of information gathered from pupil voice surveys and leaders design relevant and targeted sessions that respond to current issues.

In Welsh lessons, there are valuable opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh language skills. Staff use the school's 'Cymraeg bob dydd' strategy well to promote the development of these skills. There are a few worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of Welsh heritage and culture. For example, pupils recently celebrated 'Diwrnod Owain Glyndwr'. Support for pupils to use their Welsh language skills across the curriculum is beginning to have an impact.

There is a valuable programme of enrichment activities for pupils, including a homework club and Mandarin club that support pupils' learning. Beneficial trips and visits have taken place, including a visit to Berlin for those studying German and more local visits such as to Plas Mawr, a local heritage site.

## Care, support and guidance

Ysgol Eirias offers strong care, support and guidance to its pupils. The school has an inclusive and supportive ethos that promotes pupils' well-being and emotional health effectively.

The highly committed pastoral team works closely together to support pupils' emotional, social and behavioural needs, and to ensure that they are ready to learn and get the most from school life. Communication with parents is at the core of their work and they use a range of effective measures to achieve this.

Provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) is a particular strength of the school. There is a staged approach to support, which is underpinned by positive relationships and strong values of inclusion. A well-organised and extensive support team enables the provision to be co-ordinated and tailored to meet the needs of pupils well. 'Hafan', the nurture room, allows pupils who require extra support to access individual or group sessions with a variety of specialist staff. This enables these pupils to engage positively with their education and develop self-confidence. The Eirias Pupil Inclusion Centre (EPIC) provides a safe and calm environment for pupils with emotional difficulties.

The school has prepared appropriately for meeting the requirements of the ALNET reform. One-page profiles and Individual Development Plans provide detailed information on the needs of pupils and include clear, measurable targets. Staff are starting to use this information to inform their planning and assessment. The Key Stage 4 curriculum has been expanded to include courses that offer pupils valuable life skills in direct response to pupils' requests. The school works closely with a range of external partners to provide helpful support for pupils where necessary.

Leaders have designed a well-considered and comprehensive personal and social education programme which caters well for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In addition, there is a wide range of well-planned opportunities to explore themes such as pupils' mental health and emotional needs, their identity, as well as equality and diversity. These programmes are starting to have a positive impact as many pupils interact with their peers with care and respect. The involvement of guest speakers is a strong feature of the provision, which brings expertise and authenticity to the pupils' experience. However, the school has not fully evaluated the schemes' impact on pupils' personal development.

Following the pandemic, the school is beginning to reintroduce a wide range of beneficial extra-curricular activities. Extensive sporting opportunities promote pupils' physical health and a diverse menu of clubs help to expand their social and cultural experience and encourage their creative imagination. Examples of these opportunities include the photography club, a gospel choir, and the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. In addition, educational visits at home and abroad include an outdoor education visit to Nant Bwlch yr Haearn and a sixth form history group attending sessions on the Holocaust. Pupils from Ysgol Eirias regularly support local community events such as the Remembrance-day parade and national charity fundraisers like Children in Need.

The school has a strong approach to child protection and developing a safeguarding culture. All staff undertake regular beneficial training and, as a result, staff understand their role and responsibilities well. The school responds promptly and effectively to child protection concerns and works closely with outside agencies to provide support for pupils and their families.

The school has suitable procedures for monitoring and promoting pupils' attendance. It has implemented beneficial strategies to support pupils with poor attendance to return to school. However, this has not had sufficient impact on the attendance of those pupils eligible for free school meals.

During the inspection, a few health and safety issues regarding the school site came to the attention of the inspection team. The headteacher is already aware of these and is working with the local education authority to resolve them. The school will receive a well-being letter to highlight these issues.

### **Leadership and management**

The headteacher, ably supported by the senior leadership team, provides consistently strong leadership. She leads with passion and is highly ambitious for the school. She places full trust in the senior leadership team and together they have worked successfully to manage the school as it recovers after the COVID-19 pandemic. They share the vision of 'Succeeding Together' with the aim of improving pupils' life chances as well as improving the quality of life of the wider community. This vision is communicated through all the school's work and is embraced by all stakeholders at the school. This has led to successful collaboration at many levels.

Senior leaders' responsibilities are delegated sensibly, defined clearly and understood well. Line management arrangements are clear and middle leaders benefit from frequent discussions of their work. Senior leaders hold them to account appropriately. The school has been successful in identifying and improving the practice of staff that are underperforming with support tailored to their individual needs. Strong leadership has had a positive effect on several aspects of the school's work such as the culture of safeguarding, curriculum development and professional learning. Leaders pay due regard to securing equity for those pupils experiencing disadvantage through, for example, providing educational visits and supplying resources.

Overall, middle leaders are fully invested in the school, and supportive of the senior leaders and each other. They are aware of the school's priorities and their role in securing progress against whole school targets such as curriculum development. However, they are not always secure in their quality assurance of teaching and learning, particularly the development of pupils' skills.

Systems to manage staff performance are robust and effective. They provide clear links to whole school priorities and professional learning opportunities that help staff to achieve their objectives. Senior leaders drive an increasingly effective culture of reflection and continuous self-improvement. Since the headteacher took up post, leaders have reflected carefully on quality assurance processes. Just before the pandemic, the school started to introduce new quality assurance processes to provide more helpful first-hand information. The previous focus upon compliance with

policies and expectations has gradually been replaced by processes intended to feed into improvement planning more accurately. A few of these processes continue to evolve but are beginning to contribute to a more continuous and responsive approach to improvement, and to support robust professional dialogue around how to achieve high quality provision.

Generally, leaders identify helpful priorities for improvement. However, currently self-evaluation processes do not always focus well enough on the impact that teaching has on the development of pupils' skills in particular. Consequently, it is difficult for leaders to be precise enough about the aspects of their work they are aiming to improve or about what success might look like. This also makes it more difficult for them to monitor accurately the progress the school is making towards the improvements required.

Governors are committed and proud of the school. They undertake their roles enthusiastically and have a good understanding of the school's main strengths and areas for development. They provide suitable challenge to leaders based on the information they receive. The governing body promotes healthy eating and drinking successfully through the food and fitness policy, which follows statutory guidance.

The comprehensive professional learning programme is a notable strength. It offers general and bespoke internal training for leaders, teachers and support staff. This is enhanced further by collaboration with external providers and online training. Staff benefit from working with schools in the cluster and with schools across the region. For example, recent alliances have focused on curriculum developments and establishing a new teaching and learning policy.

The school benefits from being an initial teacher education (ITE) lead school by providing valuable opportunities for leaders to deliver and present to trainees. In turn, staff gather new ideas and learn from trainee teachers as they complete research projects as part of their training.

The headteacher and business manager manage the school budget effectively. The school currently has positive financial reserves. Grants, including the pupil development grant, are spent appropriately. The spending of these grants is monitored carefully and has contributed positively to improving pupil well-being.

The school communicates effectively with parents and has nurtured a generally productive relationship with families. This includes the use of an online system that allows parents to be kept informed about their child's education. This platform also provides an opportunity to share news and messages between the school and parents.

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

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