



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

**A report on**

**Ysgol Derwenfa**

**Queen Street  
Leeswood  
Nr. Mold  
Flintshire  
CH7 4RQ**

**Date of inspection: December 2022**

**by**

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

## About Ysgol Derwenfa

Name of provider	Ysgol Derwenfa
Local authority	Flintshire County Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	N/A
Number of pupils on roll	95
Pupils of statutory school age	71
Number in nursery classes	17
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 Primary is 23.0%)	30.2%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Primary is 16.1%)	16.9%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	0.0%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2007
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/01/2014
Start date of inspection	05/12/2022

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](http://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 Derwenfa is a nurturing and hard-working school that places a high priority on the well-being of its staff and pupils. Leaders have created a strong culture of mutual support when working together towards the school's core values. These values are shared across the school community and encourage respect and kindness between staff and pupils.

The quality of teaching is strong across the school and all staff know their pupils well and ensure that they take good account of their individual needs. While many pupils start school with basic skills below those normally expected, during their time in the school they are well supported and make strong progress in most areas of the curriculum. Teachers provide useful opportunities for pupils to influence their own learning and classrooms are productive working environments where pupils share an enthusiasm for learning.

Staff work well together to create learning experiences that suitably reflect the principles of the curriculum for Wales. They enhance learning with school trips or engaging pupils in the local community, for example when writing articles for the local newsletter or singing in a nearby café. Parents feel well supported by staff, have useful opportunities to understand the progress their children are making and are encouraged to become involved in school life.

Senior leaders and governors have created a strong culture of collaboration to support school improvement and approaches to monitoring and evaluation provide a clear direction for the school. Governors have a positive impact on self-evaluation and know their school well. They set useful targets for improvement, which often have a positive impact on improving teaching and learning at the school. However, in a very few instances, these do not focus well enough on how well pupils make progress in key areas such as their digital skills, spoken Welsh or their ability to apply their numeracy skills in other areas of the curriculum.

There is effective support for pupils with additional learning needs, and the school thinks carefully about how to support pupils' basic skills in literacy and numeracy as well as addressing their social and emotional needs. As a result, the school is an inclusive environment where staff work hard to ensure pupils make good progress and are becoming ambitious and capable learners.

## Recommendations

- R1 Improve opportunities for pupils to develop their numeracy and digital skills progressively across the curriculum
- R2 Improve pupils' speaking skills in Welsh

## **What happens next**

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

## Main evaluation

### Learning

Many pupils start school with basic skills in literacy and numeracy below the expected level for their age. However, nearly all pupils including those with additional learning needs and those eligible for free school meals make strong progress from their starting points.

Pupils make strong progress in their literacy skills in English. They begin to develop a wide vocabulary from an early age and use it well when expressing their ideas, for example when discussing materials to make animal masks. Younger pupils develop their confidence in speaking for a range of purposes, for example to tell each other stories using puppets. Older pupils speak eloquently about school life with visitors, building on their explanations and justifying their opinions. Most pupils develop sound reading skills. The youngest pupils quickly begin to recognise the sounds that different letters make and, as they progress, they use strategies to decode and blend unfamiliar words. Most older pupils demonstrate a genuine enjoyment of reading. They react with excitement and empathy to plot developments in their class reading books and many become confident readers by the end of Year 6.

Most pupils develop their writing skills well. From a very early age, they begin to make marks that become increasingly legible. Younger pupils begin to write simple sentences, for example to explain where different animals live, and to provide instructions for washing your hands. By the end of Year 2, many pupils write extended paragraphs with a fair degree of accuracy, for example to describe 'Burglar Bill'. Older pupils write in an increasing range of forms, for instance they identify the features of a wanted poster then prepare their own, to appeal for information about the Iron Man. Many begin to use vocabulary for effect and write skilfully for authentic purposes, for example when contributing ably to the local community newsletter.

Pupils hear Welsh being spoken regularly in school and develop positive attitudes towards the language. Younger pupils begin to develop a basic understanding of key phrases and vocabulary in Welsh. For example, they match leaves they have collected outside to the corresponding colours in Welsh and take part in the daily 'helpwr heddiw' session with enthusiasm. Older pupils recognise an increasing range of vocabulary and begin to convey simple personal information in Welsh. However, overall, pupils do not make strong enough progress in developing their skills or confidence in speaking Welsh.

Most pupils develop a good understanding of mathematical concepts. Younger pupils apply their learning in practical contexts. For example, they use blocks to measure different items, and by Year 2 they begin to use standard measurements accurately. Older pupils recall their prior learning well, dealing with number confidently and use these skills appropriately to solve basic mathematical problems, for example when finding the total cost of items in a shopping catalogue. However, pupils do not always apply and strengthen their numeracy skills well enough across the curriculum.

Nearly all pupils develop their creative skills well. Younger pupils for example, use leaves they have collected to represent flames in their artwork linked to their class

topic. Older pupils combine artistic techniques to create collage and paintings based on the symbolism of poppies to commemorate Remembrance Sunday. Many pupils enjoy discussing different types of music, inspired by the school's 'music genre of the week'.

Many pupils develop appropriate digital skills. Younger pupils make bar charts and input instructions to send a programmable toy to a specific destination. Pupils in Year 3 and Year 4 use digital tools to take part in a QR code hunt in the outdoors to find out information about natural and manufactured materials. Many pupils in Year 5 and Year 6 make attractive digital presentations that include hyperlinks, for example when learning about different disabilities. Members of the Digi-Club have recently started to assist their peers to develop coding skills by inputting instructions to control animated characters. Overall, however, pupils do not develop a broad enough range of digital skills or build upon them progressively enough to apply them at an appropriate level across the curriculum.

Nearly all pupils develop good physical skills. Younger pupils develop their dexterity by twisting loom bands onto lolly sticks or using tools to manipulate plasticine. They develop their strength and fitness well, for example when using tricycles and moving tyres to create a caterpillar in the outdoor area. Older pupils apply their physical skills with enthusiasm, for example during their daily playground activities, or taking part in extra-curricular competitions such as athletics festivals or football tournaments.

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

Pupils at Ysgol Derwenfa are polite, courteous, and respectful towards each other, staff, and visitors. They are proud of their school and feel safe and secure within its positive and caring learning environment. Nearly all pupils are confident that adults will listen to their concerns and deal with any problems that arise fairly. Nearly all behave well in lessons, at breaktimes and as they move around the school. They have positive attitudes to learning, they settle quickly to tasks and work with sustained concentration to complete activities. Many pupils develop the confidence to suggest how they might improve their work and show resilience when faced with challenging tasks. They understand what to do to overcome any difficulties they experience in their learning, for example by applying the schools '5Bs' strategy.

Most pupils respond productively to the advice and support given by teaching staff. They understand how to respond to feedback and use it competently to move their learning forwards. They are keen to complete tasks to a high standard and will persevere to ensure it is their best work. Pupils in the foundation learning class for example, diligently redraft letters to baby bear, improving on content and presentation.

Nearly all pupils work and play well co-operatively. They know how to keep themselves healthy and safe, and are developing as healthy, confident learners. Pupils understand the importance of a balanced diet and how to keep both their bodies and minds fit and healthy. For example, younger pupils learn about healthy eating as part of their topic 'Dyma Ni / Ourselves' where they set up a Welsh snack area and sample a range of healthy foods. Almost all pupils have a strong understanding of how to keep safe online. For example, they design their own secure passwords.

Most pupils participate in a variety of physical activities with enthusiasm, including physical education lessons and extra-curricular activities such as multi-sport and athletics. Many are physically active during playtimes where they participate in team games such as football or small group activities using hoops and cones. They particularly enjoy the range of new outdoor play equipment and share this considerately with each other. The school participates in local sporting events such as the rural school football tournament.

Most pupils have a good understanding of their rights and are developing as ethical informed citizens. For example, they reflect thoughtfully on the need for rules and sanctions in their school and community and contribute thoughtfully to the development of the school and classroom rules. This leads to a respectful ethos throughout the school, where most pupils show empathy and consideration to each other.

Many pupils develop their leadership skills well through a range of pupil voice groups, such as the school council. These groups have a genuine impact on school life. For example, the Criw Cymraeg organise a 'Bore Bril' to support the Welsh football team and raise funds for the purchase of new playground equipment. Nearly all pupils contribute well to the life of the school. Those who are not elected as members of the school voice groups often take on other responsibilities, such as becoming librarians.

Most pupils understand their role in supporting the local community and how they can impact the wider world. For example, they sing at a local café, attend a Remembrance Sunday service at the village cenotaph and perform for local residents in a harvest concert at the local community centre. These events provide valuable opportunities for pupils to engage with members of the wider community.

Although attendance has improved compared to last year, when the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact nationally on school attendance, pupils eligible for free school meals have a notably higher rate of absence compared to other pupils.

## **Teaching and learning experiences**

All teachers create and maintain positive working relationships with pupils. They are ably supported by teaching assistants who provide purposeful guidance for groups of pupils and individuals. As a result, nearly all pupils including pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) and those eligible for free school meals make strong progress.

Staff celebrate pupils' achievements prominently through wall displays that recognise steps in the learning as well as the finished product. Teachers make effective use of their class 'learning walls' to support pupils' independence and to reinforce prior learning. Staff manage their classrooms well and ensure that pupils know what is expected of them. As a result, nearly all pupils behave well and play an active part in lessons.

Teachers plan and deliver engaging lessons that enthuse pupils. They ensure that the pupils' voice is central to their planning, for example when younger pupils ask to learn more about historical fire engines during their class topic teachers make sure that they incorporate this into their planning. As a result, pupils are engaged in their learning and talk with enthusiasm about their whole school topics such as 'Dyma Ni'.

Staff promote pupils' independence well. They ensure that pupils become confident to make choices from an early age, including which areas of learning to engage with and the activities they wish to complete. Staff provide older pupils with valuable opportunities to collaborate in pairs and small groups.

All teachers deliver lessons with suitable pace. Lesson introductions include a variety of short activities that serve as useful reminders of prior learning as well as a means to convey new information. Staff ensure that pupils regularly examine examples of good work, so they know what to aspire to. During lessons, teachers use questioning techniques effectively, and ensure that all pupils are active in their learning by encouraging them to share answers and ideas in different ways. For example, pupils share ideas using digital tools, and by writing on mini whiteboards. Teachers make effective use of the outdoor areas throughout the school. They provide valuable opportunities for pupils to apply skills in a practical manner. For example, pupils in Year 5 and Year 6 gather sticks and leaves to show the fractions of shapes.

Teachers generally plan series of lessons that build well upon pupils' prior learning. They provide valuable opportunities for pupils to apply and practise their literacy skills across the curriculum. For example, younger pupils describe their favourite garden birds, and older pupils write a biography of David Attenborough. However, teachers do not always give enough consideration to developing pupils' digital and numeracy skills across the curriculum.

Teachers identify pupils' misconceptions quickly and intervene during lessons or very soon afterwards. They provide valuable verbal and written feedback to pupils and apply the school's new feedback and marking policy well. Recently, teachers have started to provide pupils with more effective opportunities to enrich their work in response to written feedback. As a result, pupils are beginning to take pride in the improvements they make to their work.

The school has developed a suitable vision for its curriculum based on the key aims and values of 'caring, nurturing, succeeding and growing'. Staff have identified 'non-negotiable' core aims that make their curriculum individual to the school community and the needs of its pupils. These elements are evident in the experiences pupils receive throughout the school, such as the inclusive environment, and learning outdoors.

There are suitable opportunities for pupils to learn about Welsh culture, for example when preparing artwork and crafts for the school eisteddfod and learning about the history of the Welsh princes, such as Dafydd ap Gruffydd. Staff promote the Welsh language appropriately by including bilingual elements to wall displays, modelling Welsh phrases during lessons and providing opportunities for pupils to enjoy singing and dancing along to Welsh songs. However, overall, teachers do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to develop their Welsh skills progressively and become confident speakers.

Staff enrich the curriculum with visitors who inspire pupils, such as a local musician, and members of the emergency services. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the school is reintroducing a valuable range of offsite visits. For example, younger learners visit an aquarium, while older pupils visit Talacre beach as part of their work about lighthouses.

Teachers provide thoughtful opportunities for pupils to learn about our diverse world. For example, they compare the Christian and Jewish version of the creation story with Sikh beliefs. Teachers support pupils' social and emotional development very well. They arrange valuable support for pupils where necessary, for example to build confidence in their ability to transition safely to secondary school.

### **Care, support and guidance**

The school is a nurturing and caring environment where pupils feel safe, happy, and secure. Most pupils feel well supported by staff, and each other, within a positive environment that puts a clear emphasis on learning and well-being.

Learning support is a strong feature of the school. Leaders and staff use tracking information effectively to plan and provide good support for all pupils. Staff use one-page profiles thoughtfully to understand the personal interests and learning needs of their pupils. Staff and leaders use a range of information quickly, to identify pupils who would benefit from additional support and arrange suitable interventions. The Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator monitors additional provision effectively and works well with teachers and support staff to set suitable targets for pupils' individual needs.

The school provides useful nurture intervention that has a positive impact on pupils' well-being. Staff work skilfully, to provide pupils with the basic skills and confidence to participate in school life successfully. For example, staff help pupils to understand how their brains regulate emotions, and how they can develop strategies to help them control their feelings. Staff work effectively with outside agencies including the local authority to ensure that additional support is available for identified pupils.

The school provides suitable opportunities for pupils to develop their spiritual and ethical beliefs. Staff ensure that the planned curriculum, work carried out in class and high-quality assemblies guide pupils to develop a respect for others. Through themed event days, such as Mental Health Awareness Day, pupils have opportunities to distinguish between right and wrong choices. As part of topic work, pupils learn about diversity and the impact this can have on people's lives. Year 5 and Year 6 pupils have designed and created high quality digital presentations, highlighting visible and invisible disabilities.

The school seeks opportunities for pupils to participate in a good range of art and creative activities. The celebration of the school vision and the creation of the school mural provided opportunities for pupils to express themselves creatively and feel part of the school community.

The school provides a varied range of experiences and visits that support the curriculum and help pupils to engage in their learning. For example, pupils work with a biodiversity expert from the local area to plant snowdrops and spring flowers. Older pupils benefit from residential trips to take part in outdoor pursuits. Staff provide opportunities for local artists and theatre groups to work in school to support and enhance the curriculum. The school provides worthwhile opportunities for pupils to perform in celebrations including the annual Eisteddfod.

The school has appropriate arrangements in place to monitor attendance, class awards encourage pupils to attend regularly, and useful information is given to parents about their children's attendance. Leaders work suitably with outside agencies, including the education welfare officer to give further support for those pupils not attending regularly. However, the school does not always identify specific aspects of pupils' attendance that need attention, for example the attendance of pupils eligible free school meals. There is a secure culture of safeguarding across the school and arrangements to safeguard pupils meet requirements.

## **Leadership and management**

The headteacher is a strong role model who sets clear expectations for the direction of the school. He is supported by an effective deputy and a team of dedicated staff and governors who work well together to develop a clear vision for teaching and learning. The headteacher puts staff and pupil well-being at the heart of the school's work and culture. There is a strong ethos of mutual support across the school, where all staff work hard to embody the school's principles of caring, growing, nurturing, and succeeding.

Leaders successfully develop a shared responsibility for self-evaluation and school improvement. All teachers take on leadership roles and influence the direction of the school and collaborate on deciding improvement priorities. Leaders, and staff use a range of evaluative approaches including learning walks, work scrutinies, listening to learners and support from the school improvement partner. They use feedback from these activities to accurately identify the needs of the school and address national priorities, such as implementing the curriculum for Wales and ALN reform successfully. In the best examples, the school's priorities for improvement relate directly to teaching and its impact on learning, for example when developing formative approaches to assessment. However, in a minority of instances, actions do not focus clearly on pupil progress, for instance the impact of provision on improving pupils' digital skills.

Leaders ensure that targets for improvement have suitable timescales and staff work closely together to share and reflect upon progress. Governors are actively involved in the school's evaluation and improvement cycle and as a result have a clear understanding of the progress the school is making. They share useful observations during monitoring visits to further support school improvement, for example when refining the school's approaches to teachers' feedback to pupils.

Senior leaders create a strong culture of professional learning across the school. Professional learning is closely linked to the school's core aims, its specific improvement priorities and the individual needs of staff. Leaders have refined the school's systems to better identify opportunities for professional learning, monitor its impact on the quality of teaching and share good practice. This approach is strengthening staff well-being and collaboration across the school. Leaders ensure that all staff have purposeful opportunities to engage in professional learning, which often adds value to their work, for example in improving teaching in the outdoor environment.

Leaders and staff have established effective links with parents. Staff provide regular communication using digital platforms and have re-established face to face parent

meetings to discuss pupil progress following the COVID-19 pandemic. These are highly valued by parents, particularly the opportunities to share and celebrate their children's work.

Leaders ensure that pupils' learning is monitored carefully. Staff and leaders meet regularly to discuss the progress of all pupils, including those with ALN and those impacted by poverty. They use a well-considered range of information, such as test data and teachers' formative observations, to make good decisions about the next steps in pupils learning. As a result, leaders and staff have a secure understanding of the progress pupils make during their time at the school.

Leaders and governors manage the budget carefully and ensure that resources are deployed effectively. They ensure that classrooms and outdoor learning environments are suitably equipped and there are appropriate levels of staffing across the school. Leaders use the pupil development grant purposefully to address the impact of poverty on attainment. The school has increased staffing to provide valuable additional support for pupils' basic skills and their social and emotional development.

Overall, leaders and governors make appropriate arrangements to ensure that food and drink provided by the school meets statutory requirements. However, leaders do not always ensure that pupils drink choices are appropriate. For example, a minority of pupils bring in drinks other than water from home.

Leaders have developed a secure safeguarding culture in the school where pupils feel safe, understand where to go if they need help and all staff have a clear understanding of appropriate procedures for dealing with concerns.

## Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carer 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

## 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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