



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

**A report on**

**Ysgol Gynradd Coed y Dderwen**

**Gellideg Estate  
Merthyr Tydfil  
CF48 1LG**

**Date of inspection: October 2023**

**by**

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

## About Ysgol Gynradd Coed y Dderwen

Name of provider	Ysgol Gynradd Coed y Dderwen
Local authority	Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	234
Pupils of statutory school age	181
Number in nursery classes	28
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%)	42.3%
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%)	11.0%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	6.1%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2019
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	10/01/2016
Start date of inspection	16/10/2023

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

Leaders and staff at Ysgol Coed y Dderwen work diligently together to create a positive and caring learning community where the well-being of pupils, their families and staff is paramount. The highly effective leadership, along with passionate and well-informed governors, know their school and local community well. They work conscientiously to reduce the impact of poverty on the lives and life-chances of all pupils. They know what pupils need to thrive. This means that pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are exemplary.

Staff ensure that the school is a calm environment, where pupils learn through a range of interesting experiences drawn from an exciting and highly innovative curriculum. On a few occasions, teachers over-direct learning, which means that pupils are not always challenged to their full potential. Staff use the outdoors effectively to inspire and enrich pupils' learning experiences. They ensure that pupils develop their skills and become independent, resourceful and creative individuals. Pupils are confident and articulate speakers who write purposefully across the curriculum. They develop their physical skills well through activities that improve their dexterity and stamina indoors and out. During their time in school, nearly all pupils make at least expected progress, including those with additional learning needs and those who attend the learning resource base.

All staff work together well to promote a caring and nurturing ethos throughout the school. They all know their roles well to keep pupils safe. The school has a strong culture of safeguarding children. However, the current arrangements for pedestrians and vehicles to enter and leave the school grounds during drop-off and collection times are not appropriate.

## Recommendations

- R1 Address the health and safety issue that was identified during the core inspection
- R2 Ensure that teachers offer sufficient challenge for pupils of all abilities

## What happens next

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

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on its work in relation to designing a rich, varied and engaging curriculum, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

## Main evaluation

### Learning

Most pupils start school with skills at a stage of development below those expected for their age. During their time in school, nearly all pupils, including those with additional learning needs (ALN), those who are eligible for free school meals and those in the school's learning resource base, make at least expected progress from their individual starting points.

Across the school, many pupils develop well as articulate speakers. Pupils in the youngest classes express their ideas readily and older pupils offer their opinions confidently when expressing their views in group discussions. By the time they leave school, a few engage their audience effectively when presenting their ideas in formal and informal situations. Nearly all pupils across the school listen well to each other and to staff and visitors.

Most pupils enjoy reading and become competent readers. Younger pupils follow simple instructions and, by the time they reach Year 2, they read familiar words fluently. Many pupils in the learning resource base show an interest in reading and an appreciation of books. They recall simple plots and describe characters, predict what may happen next and demonstrate great joy when listening to stories read by staff. As pupils move through the school, they use different strategies effectively to decode unfamiliar words. They read and respond appropriately to texts, for example to recall events in stories, to predict what may happen next and to express their opinions. Most pupils in the oldest classes read with fluency and expression.

Pupils' writing skills develop well as they move through the school. Pupils in Year 1 write in response to their learning, for example when creating a fact file about refuse collectors as part of their work on careers. Older pupils develop a sound understanding of the skills they need to write in a range of genres. They construct sentences effectively and engage the reader in their creative writing, using effective story openings and vivid character descriptions. They write clear explanations and include relevant facts and opinions in their reports, for example when creating newspaper articles on industrial action. Pupils benefit from opportunities to write at length, revising and redrafting their work to add additional detail and description. Most pupils develop secure literacy skills as they progress through the school. They apply their reading skills appropriately and write purposefully to convey their ideas across the curriculum.

Most pupils develop a good range of mathematical skills. The youngest pupils use ribbons effectively to compare their height to that of their friends. Pupils in Year 2 measure accurately using rulers, tape measures and metre sticks. Many older pupils accurately explain the methods they use to work out solutions to mathematical problems, for example when finding the square root of numbers and when plotting coordinates in the four quadrants. However, they do not apply their numeracy skills often enough in real life contexts or at a sufficiently challenging level to secure their understanding.

Across the school, pupils develop their Welsh language skills appropriately. Many pupils greet visitors suitably in Welsh and respond to basic questions with support. Older pupils use a basic range of questions when speaking to visitors.

Most pupils develop a suitable range of digital skills and often use these skills to support their learning. Pupils in the Reception class, for example, create little green aliens using an online art package and pupils in Years 4 and 5 use digital design packages to plan a room suitable for an evacuee. Older pupils are beginning to use spreadsheets for costing and develop their coding skills when programming animations.

Most pupils develop good physical skills. The youngest pupils use a range of tools with precision and develop good movement and balancing skills during PE lessons. Older pupils improve and refine their physical skills through a range of sports and creative activities. They especially benefit from developing their stamina when building beds for planting, filling them with soil and adding trellis panels.

Pupils enjoy opportunities to be creative across many aspects of their learning. For example, young pupils choose natural and man-made materials when creating looms for weaving and older pupils research, design and present their ideas on fashion through the ages. They work well together in pairs to share ideas, combining their favourite design choices on mood boards. From a young age, pupils experiment with percussion and compose tunes using digital technology.

Pupils develop their critical thinking from the moment they start school. With the help of staff, the youngest pupils reflect on their learning, recalling, for example, predictions they have made about the properties of ice. The oldest pupils piece together evidence using a set of facts to work out who the prime suspect in a murder case might be. In groups they create theories and discuss the likelihood of each scenario. They understand how the skills they use will benefit them in future and could be applied to a range of careers.

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

Across the school, pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is exemplary. Nearly all pupils are polite to each other and to adults. This reflects the strong, nurturing ethos of the school. Nearly all pupils feel safe in school and know who to talk to if they need support. They feel confident that staff deal quickly and effectively with any concerns. They understand how to keep themselves safe online and talk knowledgeably about visitors, such as the police, who reinforce these messages.

Nearly all pupils engage well with their learning and show positive attitudes. Pupils are proud of their work and share their learning enthusiastically with adults and peers. They collaborate well and value each other's contributions and opinions. Nearly all pupils are developing well as independent learners. In the nursery and reception classes, for example, pupils persevere when attempting to use stones to create depictions of faces reflecting how they are feeling. Older pupils sustain concentration and engage purposefully in their learning when choosing where to work independently around the school. Most pupils in the learning resource base make simple decisions about aspects of their learning. For example, pupils who integrate into a mainstream class discuss an appropriate time to visit and make

choices about their activity during classroom sessions. Across the school, pupils reflect well on their learning, to identify their next steps and improve their work. They ask and answer questions thoughtfully to clarify their understanding. For example, in the older classes, pupils consider aspects of their design work, comparing their fashion designs and making improvements after discussions with staff and fellow pupils.

Pupils enjoy choosing from a range of activities available through the school's 'CYD Academy'. For example, pupils learn First Aid so that they can help others. They play chess to develop their thinking skills in a calm environment and improved their coding skills when creating maths games for others to play. Pupils develop leadership skills through the opportunities they have to participate in decision-making groups across the school. For example, the Curriculum Design Team gathers the views of all pupils on the enquiries they would like to pursue. The school's Criw Cymraeg lead weekly Welsh assemblies and promote the use of Welsh in classes.

All pupils participate enthusiastically in a range of physical activities. Pupils develop their fine and gross motor skills well in a range of contexts linked to their learning, including manipulating playdough, cutting around shapes with scissors and riding bikes and trikes expertly. Pupils make healthy choices and understand the importance of a balanced diet. The pupil-led School Nutrition Action Group provides a fruit tuck shop during breaktimes and encourages pupils to bring in healthy lunchboxes.

### **Teaching and learning experiences**

The school has worked with its community to design a curriculum that meets the needs of its pupils closely. The curriculum is rich, varied and engaging with the four purposes of the Curriculum for Wales at its heart. Teachers plan authentic learning experiences that allow pupils to make meaningful links in their learning. For example, older pupils use what they've learnt in their science and maths lessons to calculate their carbon footprint. Across the school, pupils benefit from opportunities to develop as independent learners, making choices about how they learn and present their work. This enables them to understand the purpose and benefits of the knowledge and skills they develop.

The school's approach to whole-school learning experiences is a notable strength. The work on farming and enterprise, for example, provides opportunities for pupils to deepen their learning by transferring skills and knowledge across other areas of the curriculum. Teachers plan for pupils to develop skills progressively so that pupils can master and use skills such as tying knots, using tools, lighting fires and building shelters in different scenarios. During these activities, pupils extend their vocabulary and communication skills in addition to their creativity and imagination. Pupils enjoy organising themselves with growing independence, developing their curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking. In the learning resource base, staff develop their curriculum further by working closely with a local special school.

Teachers generally plan sequences of lessons that extend pupils' skills and deepen their understanding of concepts across areas of learning and experience. During these lessons, they adapt their teaching approaches to support pupils' individual learning needs. Teachers and support staff reflect thoughtfully on what went well and

what could be improved. Teachers plan systematically to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills and evaluate purposefully how well teaching and learning experiences support pupil progress. They often develop opportunities for pupils to apply and consolidate their literacy and digital skills across the curriculum. However, they do not plan experiences that enable pupils to transfer their numeracy skills to purposeful contexts as effectively.

Teachers plan beneficial opportunities for pupils to explore the culture and heritage of Wales, its history, landmarks, and governance. They extend this work to enable pupils to learn about the wider world. These experiences help pupils to gain a sense of belonging and a better understanding of life in the past and present. Pupils link this learning to their own aspirations, considering the qualities they may need for future careers. Teachers support pupils to learn Welsh language skills in lessons, but do not always encourage pupils to communicate in Welsh often enough during the school day.

The school supports pupils to understand human rights and diversity appropriately. They celebrate religious festivals and explore the lives of influential people of different ethnicities. Older pupils consider freedom and rights when exploring the lives of advocates such as Rosa Parks in the fight for equality. Across the school, pupils relish the time spent in the woodland area. They enjoy building dens, taking measured risks, and making and using a wide range of tools. During these activities staff develop pupils' curiosity, creativity, and independent skills. They also ensure that pupils gain an impressive knowledge of biodiversity.

Staff across the school, including the learning resource base, have excellent working relationships with pupils. They have a good understanding of their strengths and areas for development. Teachers provide lessons that are motivating and engage pupils' interest effectively. Lessons move at an appropriate pace to support pupils' learning and to keep them interested and on task. Support staff work skilfully alongside pupils to nurture positive attitudes of perseverance and resilience. This allows pupils to develop as enthusiastic and ambitious learners. All staff manage behaviour extremely well, making sure that pupils are free to concentrate on their activities without being disrupted by the actions of others. In the learning resource base, staff have created a climate for learning that supports and nurtures each pupil so that they develop their confidence, kindness, and willingness to engage in an appropriate range of learning experiences.

Most staff use a range of questioning techniques purposefully to challenge pupils' thinking and assess their understanding. They provide clear instructions and expectations to ensure that pupils know what they need to do to complete their tasks successfully. Staff use interesting resources to engage pupils' curiosity, for example when taking pumpkins from the school's pumpkin patch to discover what is inside and the best way to get it out. However, occasionally, teachers over-direct learning and this inhibits their ability to challenge and extend pupils' skills at a deeper level.

Across the school, staff provide valuable, supportive verbal feedback during lessons and activities. Staff encourage pupils to think about what they have learnt and how they can improve. Teachers provide concise written feedback that is effective and understood well by pupils. It encourages pupils to reflect successfully on the quality of their work, to make improvements, and to develop their skills further. Teachers use

assessments of pupils' progress effectively to identify next steps in their learning and to plan and amend their provision. In the learning resource base, staff ensure that assessment and planning is meaningful for the pupils at the setting and includes a focus on sensory learning experiences that stimulates the pupils and helps to increase their concentration, focus and interest.

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

Leaders and staff work tirelessly to provide excellent levels of care, support and guidance for pupils and their families. This is a strength of the school. All staff ensure that the school is fully inclusive, and they place a strong emphasis on enhancing pupils' identity, including their understanding of Welsh heritage and culture. All staff support pupils' emotional, health and social needs extremely well through a range of effective strategies. As a result, pupils are ready to engage positively with their learning.

The Additional Learning Needs Co-ordinator (ALNCO) has a clear strategic overview of pupils' needs across the school. Leaders track pupils' progress in detail and evaluate the impact of support programmes on their progress effectively, adapting their provision accordingly. The school deploys staff effectively to support pupils with their individual needs. All learners have personalised one-page profiles that include useful information about their individual interests and what they need to develop further. As a result, nearly all pupils make at least expected progress from their starting points.

Leaders work closely with external agencies, such as the local authority's wellbeing team, the educational psychology service and social care professionals. They build valuable working relationships that are highly effective in identifying the most appropriate intervention for pupils. They also forge strong relationships with families to gain a full picture of the pupil and how best to support them in school and at home. This has a positive impact on the lives and development of pupils. The school also works closely with families to improve attendance. The Family Engagement Officer has recently initiated a range of procedures that are beginning to have a positive impact on attendance and punctuality. Staff ensure that the learning resource base is a warm and welcoming setting for learners to develop their confidence and to thrive. They plan activities and deliver interventions effectively to ensure all pupils learn the full range of skills needed for life in school and beyond.

The school ensures that pupils of all backgrounds and abilities take on positions of responsibility through participation in leadership groups. These groups include the school council, 'Wellbeing Heroes' and the 'A Team' that promotes the importance of good attendance and punctuality throughout the school. Pupils feel valued because staff listen to them and act on their ideas and suggestions. The school is beginning to support pupils to understand their rights as children. Staff arrange for older pupils to visit the younger pupils' classrooms to explain and help them to understand the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and its implications for them. Staff celebrate diversity equity and emphasise regularly that everyone is different. As a result, pupils feel safe to express their opinions and perceptions and they value one another's opinions.



The school plans a range of stimulating trips and visits to support the curriculum, such as recent visits to a museum, science park and the Royal Mint. Leaders ensure that all pupils have an opportunity to attend these trips, including those eligible for free school meals and those from low-income households. Pupils talk enthusiastically about these visits and what they learnt. Pupils have ample opportunities to participate and compete in sporting and cultural activities, including the cluster eisteddfod and sports matches. Pupils also have opportunities to perform in class assemblies and school productions or stay after school for a range of activities such as gardening club or choir practice. These experiences enhance pupils' self-confidence and physical development and their appreciation of an active, healthy lifestyle.

All staff are united in promoting a caring and nurturing ethos throughout the school. This means that every pupil feels welcome, valued and respected. The school has a strong culture of safeguarding pupils. However, the current arrangements for pedestrians and vehicles to enter and leave the school grounds during drop-off and collection times are not appropriate.

### **Leadership and management**

The headteacher provides highly effective leadership and sets an extremely positive and caring ethos throughout the school and learning resource base. She has created a clear vision for the well-being and education of all pupils and has shared this successfully throughout the whole school community. The school prides itself on its inclusive ethos and is dedicated to the sharing of expertise, and the integration of pupils and staff.

All staff work diligently and conscientiously in an environment where staff well-being is actively promoted. This has resulted in a well-established team spirit where all leaders, staff and governors know their pupils and community well. They are passionate about alleviating the effect of poverty on pupils' well-being and educational attainment. This means that the school is a calm and vibrant learning community where all pupils, including those affected by poverty, feel a sense of belonging. It is an environment in which they can all believe, achieve and create their dreams. Leaders have clear strategic objectives and understand their responsibilities well. They have high expectations of themselves, of staff and all pupils. As a result, a caring, nurturing ethos permeates through all of the school's activities.

The school engages well with parents. Leaders ask parents for their views on the school's provision annually and act upon their suggestions where appropriate. For example, residential visits for older pupils have been reinstated following feedback from parents. Staff ensure good working relationships with parents and keep them well informed of important developments, new initiatives and ideas on how they can help their children at home. As a result, nearly all parents feel well informed and consider themselves important members of the school community. Leaders also work closely with families to help tackle the effects of poverty by supplying free donated uniforms, fancy dress and Christmas jumpers. They subsidise all school trips so that costs are as low as possible and work alongside the local well-being centre to offer support and guidance on a range of issues for parents.

The governing body is knowledgeable, effective and passionately committed to supporting the school. Governors have a comprehensive understanding of the work

of the school and its impact in ensuring the well-being of all pupils and its success in providing an exciting learning environment. They have a clear insight into the school's strengths and areas for improvement and contribute purposefully to monitoring activities, including meeting pupils to discuss their work and experiences. They take their responsibilities in promoting healthy eating and drinking amongst pupils seriously, having instigated the fruit tuck shop. They discuss healthy eating regularly with the school nutrition action group (SNAG). They challenge sensibly as critical friends and hold leaders to account for the school's performance. Along with the headteacher, they monitor the expenditure and the impact of the school's resources prudently. This includes the use of the pupil development grant, ensuring that it is used appropriately so that all eligible pupils receive the support necessary to improve their standards and well-being.

Leaders have developed robust procedures for monitoring and evaluating the quality of the school's work. They gather a wide range of evidence to inform their views, including learning walks, scrutiny of pupils' books and analysing pupil progress data. They have adapted their approach to observing lessons so that teachers feel free to take risks and to innovate whilst maintaining a focus on ensuring that pupils make good progress. These processes help leaders to understand the school's strengths and areas for development. For example, they identified the need to improve the attendance levels and punctuality of pupils. This resulted in staff putting in a range of measures to help tackle the issue by working closely with families who struggle to bring their children to school on time. All staff share the responsibility for delivering national and school priorities. For example, all staff have developed a curriculum that motivates, excites and engages the interest of nearly all pupils. Leaders use the findings from the self-evaluation processes effectively to inform the school's improvement plan, which they share effectively with pupils and parents.

Professional learning develops the skills and knowledge of staff and improves the quality of provision to meet the needs of the school and its pupils. This includes staff from the learning resource base who have developed a range of expertise in well-being, pedagogy, and physical support strategies. This means that pupils benefit from high quality speech and language, occupational health and physiotherapy programmes. Activities to promote professional learning for all staff link well with the school's priorities for improvement. All teachers are encouraged to take part in action research that focuses on improving something specific in their classroom. They share their successes with other teachers who may adopt the ideas into their own practice. The school works closely with other schools to share good practice, to learn from others and to develop its own way of working, for example on family engagement issues or to improve pupil progress.

## 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.

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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