



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

A report on

Ysgol Hendrefelin Special School

**Heol Hendre
Bryncoch
Neath
SA10 7TY**

Date of inspection: March 2024

by

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

About Ysgol Hendrefelin Special School

Name of provider	Ysgol Hendrefelin Special School
Local authority	Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Maintained Special
Religious character	
Number of pupils on roll	154
Pupils of statutory school age	154
Number in nursery classes	
Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average (The national percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals over a three-year average in Maintained Special is 46.8%)	51.1%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Maintained Special is 100.0%)	100.0%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	1%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	8%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/04/2020
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	30/11/2015
Start date of inspection	11/03/2024
<p>Ysgol Hendrefelin is a local authority special school maintained by Neath Port Talbot local authority. In 2013, Ysgol Hendre and Velindre Community School were federated to become the federated special schools of Afan Nedd. In January 2015, these federated schools amalgamated with Bryncoch Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) to become Ysgol Hendrefelin. The school is situated on three sites, one in Bryncoch, Neath and two in Port Talbot.</p>	

There are 169 pupils on roll, aged between 3 and 16 years, with a range of complex additional learning needs (ALN). These needs include moderate learning difficulties (MLD), autistic spectrum condition (ASC) and social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). Nearly all pupils have a local authority-maintained statement of special educational need (SEN) or an individual development plan (IDP).

The school provides residential short stay placements for pupils aged 11 to 16 with a wide range of complex educational needs.

Around half of pupils are eligible for free school meals. A very few pupils come from ethnic minority backgrounds. A few pupils are in the care of the local authority. English is the predominant language of nearly all pupils.

The headteacher was seconded as acting headteacher in September 2019 and appointed as permanent headteacher in April 2020.

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

a. The term 'additional learning needs' is being used to describe those pupils on the SEN/ALN register of the school.

Overview

Ysgol Hendrefelin is a happy school where pupils feel valued and safe. Pupils are polite, courteous, and welcoming to visitors. They show a strong awareness of cultural diversity and are proud members of the school's caring and inclusive community.

Pupils at the school communicate well with each other and with staff. They share their thoughts and feelings confidently and listen carefully to the views of others.

The curriculum is broad, balanced, and purposeful, with a clear rationale. Staff at the school plan a wide range of exciting and enjoyable learning opportunities for pupils which engages pupils well. The provision for pupils to develop their literacy and numeracy skills through outdoor learning is a notable strength of the school.

Staff have an extensive knowledge of the pupils and build strong working relationships with pupils. Across the school, teachers and support staff plan carefully to ensure that most pupils make strong progress from their starting points. Nearly all support staff are highly effective in adapting the learning to ensure that it is accessible for all pupils.

Leaders have embedded an inclusive ethos across Ysgol Hendrefelin. This is captured well in the school's vision, 'learning today for a better tomorrow'. Leaders model positive behaviours effectively and work well together. As a result, there is strong team collaboration. A notable strength of the school is the way in which leaders at all levels actively promote pupils' well-being.

Recommendations

- R1 Strengthen the consistency and effectiveness of data analysis and the use of other available information to drive strategic priorities
- R2 Continue to develop the staff's understanding of challenging behaviour in supporting pupils to regulate their emotions
- R3 Continue to strengthen arrangements to improve attendance

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

Pupils at Ysgol Hendrefelin settle well into the caring and nurturing environment and most pupils thoroughly enjoy coming to school.

Across the school, many pupils engage well in learning activities and make suitable progress within lessons and intervention sessions. Most pupils develop their social skills well. Overall, they are kind and respectful to each other and to staff and work together well in pairs and groups.

Many pupils make strong progress in improving their communication skills. In lessons, many pupils listen carefully to their teachers and support staff. Over time and where appropriate, many pupils develop confidence in their expressive communication skills. More able pupils engage willingly in extended and meaningful conversations. In general, pupils are confident to voice their opinion and learn to accept that, occasionally, they may be wrong.

Pupils' understanding of Welsh culture and their use of the Welsh language is a strong feature of the school. Most pupils use Welsh greetings effectively and are beginning to develop a growing range of simple vocabulary and language patterns.

Many pupils develop appropriate reading skills to access a variety of texts. This ranges from locating information in short texts to independently selecting books to obtain important information. More able pupils read independently and with confidence. They show a good level of understanding of a range of texts. For example, when reading 'A Christmas Carol' they provide detailed responses about the ghost of Christmas past. The reading skills of a minority of pupils who access the residential provision have been enhanced by an innovative collaboration between the residence and school staff. This provision builds successfully on skills learned in school which are reinforced during respite stays.

Over time, most pupils make appropriate progress from their starting points in developing their writing skills. Many pupils can write in sentences and a minority write in paragraphs. When given the opportunity, many more able pupils develop their independent writing skills progressively. They write for a variety of different purposes. For example, they write persuasive letters to the school community from the perspective of Ann Frank. A few more able pupils write freely and expressively, for example when writing their own stories and poems.

Most pupils develop their numeracy skills suitably within a range of meaningful contexts. They use mathematical operations with increasing confidence and can explain their methods and their reasoning. Most pupils develop a solid understanding of handling data. For example, when learning about 'the dragon that visited Hendrefelin', pupils are able to complete tally charts and transfer this information into a suitable bar chart with appropriate labels.

Many older pupils develop a range of higher order mathematical skills. For example, many are able to calculate the angles of a straight line. Many pupils are able to apply

mathematical skills to a range of real-world situations, for example when weighing ingredients in cookery lessons.

Most pupils develop appropriate and purposeful digital competence skills throughout their time in school. Lessons are supported well by a systematic ICT programme of study. Many are able to use these skills effectively across different areas of the curriculum. For example, when producing an appropriate digital graph to represent data collected during pond dipping activities.

A few pupils use an appropriate range of digital resources to access the curriculum in a more purposeful way. For example, pupils who are reluctant to use their handwriting skills often use word processors to capture their views.

Throughout their time in school, most pupils develop their creative skills well. Most pupils enjoy lessons that take a creative focus. For example, most pupils develop their creativity through their engagement with sewing, cooking and coding. Most pupils are able to think creatively to solve problems, which they apply well to real life situations. In addition, many pupils develop their independent skills well. For example, they are able follow a recipe and prepare snacks.

Across the school, many pupils improve their physical skills appropriately, for example during sensory circuits. The school uses a range of external providers to facilitate effective off site learning opportunities. For example, pupils enjoy gardening, pond dipping and surfing. As a result, most pupils develop their resilience, confidence and team-work skills in a range of exciting activities, which include building dens out of natural materials in the forest school provision. Many pupils enjoy PE sessions and develop important movement and physical literacy skills.

Over time, many pupils develop beneficial independent and problem-solving skills. A majority of pupils are beginning to understand the importance of planning their work, completing a first draft and then listening to feedback from their peers. As a result, they improve the quality of their work and deepen their understanding of important concepts.

Nearly all pupils leave school with a range of academic and vocational accreditations. These prepare them well for the next stage of their learning.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Most pupils demonstrate very positive attitudes to school and are caring and respectful. They are happy to come to school and are proud to be part of their community. Nearly all pupils develop strong and trusting relationships with skilled staff and know who to talk to if they have concerns. Pupils benefit from a nurturing and stimulating environment. As a result, nearly all pupils thrive and are ready to learn.

Most pupils behave well in lessons, and when moving around the school and during break and lunch times. Many pupils are polite and respectful towards each other and enjoy working in pairs and small groups. For example, pupils play a variety of games with their peers at break times. However, as a result of their ALN, the behaviour of a minority of pupils on the Velindre and Theodore Road sites can be disruptive to

others. Exclusions occur mostly on the Velindre and Theodore sites. These have significantly reduced over the last year.

Across all school sites most pupils are considerate and supportive of others and treat each other with kindness and consideration. Most pupils are polite and courteous, and many are keen to talk to visitors about their positive experiences at Ysgol Hendrefelin. Most pupils show a strong awareness of cultural diversity and are proud members of the school's caring and inclusive community.

Most pupils improve their attendance during their time at Ysgol Hendrefelin. However, a minority of pupils, particularly those on the Theodore Road and Velindre sites, do not attend well enough. This negatively impacts the progress of a few pupils on these sites. Most pupils arrive to lessons on time, settle quickly and display positive attitudes to peers and staff, and towards their learning. Many pupils engage successfully, ask and answer questions with curiosity, and respond well to feedback. They generally engage well with the tasks set and listen carefully to their teachers and peers.

Pupil voice is a strong feature of the school. Pupils are passionate about their roles and take them seriously. This includes representing the school council and engaging in litter picks and recycling schemes as part of the eco committee. Where appropriate, pupils actively engage in curriculum design, for example increasing their time in the outdoor learning area and increasing the offer of academic courses.

Most pupils develop a thorough knowledge and understanding of healthy lifestyles. Nearly all pupils develop their physical skills well. Many pupils enjoy the range of opportunities to develop their physical skills, appropriate to their needs. Many pupils make good use of the outdoor space where they take part in a wide range of games and activities. This supports pupils being active and develops good social skills. As a result, pupils learn to take turns and develop an understanding of how to help each other.

With support and encouragement, nearly all pupils express themselves confidently. They develop and share their views and respond to others appropriately. For example, older pupils improve their understanding of different stereotypes, such as race and gender, and how this affects the beliefs and behaviours in the wider community.

Teaching and learning experiences

Leaders have developed a highly effective and purposeful pupil-centred curriculum. This is designed in collaboration with all staff and pupils and successfully includes all areas of the curriculum. The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the needs of most pupils well. Leaders have very recently amended the curriculum offer to better meet the needs of the pupils at the Theodore Road site. This work is at a very early stage of development, and it is too early to assess the impact of this provision.

Most teachers plan successfully for pupils to develop their literacy, numeracy and digital skills in practical and real-life situations, for example when weighing ingredients for Welsh cakes and using drama to explore the life of Betty Campbell. In

addition, they support and encourage pupils well to develop their Welsh skills and their understanding of Welsh culture.

The curriculum broadens as pupils progress through the school. For example, the school provides opportunities for older pupils to gain purposeful accreditation in a range of academic options. This includes GCSEs in English, maths and science and entry pathways in a range of subjects including personal progress and ICT. There are good opportunities to access accreditation in vocational qualifications, such as hairdressing, bricklaying, and mechanics. In addition, there are useful opportunities for pupils to develop their independent living skills. Further, the school offers a range of meaningful work experience placements in the local community, for example working in a local charity shop and erecting fences on a farm on the Gower peninsular.

In most science lessons, teachers provide exciting and purposeful first-hand experiences, which engage pupils well. Pupils respond enthusiastically to the sense of awe and wonder skilfully created by teachers. As a result, many pupils acquire appropriate scientific skills. For example, when pond dipping, many pupils are able to describe an ideal habitat for pond life. Using classification charts, they accurately identify, for example, water hog louse, water boatman and dragonfly larvae. Using an appropriate range of digital and analogue equipment, they collect first-hand information in relation to biodiversity and begin to analyse differences over the seasons.

The school provides a wide range of exciting and worthwhile opportunities for pupils to develop their skills outside the classroom. Nearly all teachers plan carefully to ensure that outdoor learning develops pupils' literacy and numeracy skills progressively, for example when teaching pupils how to measure when cutting wood to make a fire and supporting them to read for information when identifying organisms during a pond dipping session. The provision for outdoor learning is a strength of the school.

Nearly all staff create welcoming and positive learning environments. They know the pupils well and over time, develop trusting and nurturing relationships with pupils.

Teachers, higher level teaching assistants and, where appropriate, nearly all support staff plan effectively across the school. Planning is detailed and generally adapted well to meet the needs and interests of pupils.

In most lessons, teaching is effective in ensuring that pupils make secure progress in their learning. In these lessons, teachers demonstrate strong subject knowledge, the pace of teaching is appropriate, and the level of challenge meets the needs of most pupils. Questioning to explore and deepen pupils' understanding is a strong feature in many lessons, for example when exploring religious festivals such as Ramadan and challenging pupils to use similes and metaphors when writing poems about sea creatures. Staff across the school provide very effective and prompt verbal feedback that celebrates what pupils have done. However, in a very few lessons, older more able pupils are not always challenged sufficiently.

Most teachers use a range of resources successfully to support curriculum delivery and deploy learning support assistants effectively. A notable strength is the way in

which learning support assistants skilfully support pupils' learning experiences to help make learning accessible.

Nearly all teachers track assessment data robustly over time to inform curriculum design and monitor pupil progress. They use this information well and ensure that teaching builds securely on pupils' previous learning. This includes gathering valuable information across a range of skills relevant to the needs of the pupils.

Parents are kept well informed about their child's progress and achievements through phone calls and meetings. Annual school reports to parents are detailed and informative. An electronic platform further supports communication with parents and enables them to view work completed in school by their child. Many parents value the information they receive about their child's progress and well-being.

Care, support and guidance

Ysgol Hendrefelin is a nurturing school. Staff know their pupils well and adapt approaches skilfully to meet the needs of pupils. Over time many pupils develop into confident and happy learners who are proud to be part of the Ysgol Hendrefelin family.

Leaders have developed effective working relationships with parents and carers who are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Communication between the school and parents is strong which is recognised and appreciated by parents. The school prides itself on the relationships that it has with its parents. Where appropriate, the school supports parents in developing a deeper understanding of their child's ALN. For example, they support parents to identify external agencies who can support them and makes direct referrals to these agencies where appropriate.

The school has strong and effective relationships with a range of partners. These are used to good effect to enhance the curriculum and support the additional learning and safeguarding needs of pupils.

There are appropriate opportunities for pupils to develop leadership roles at the school. The school council has several elected roles and pupils enjoy the responsibility that comes with these roles. The school council has been responsible for extending the range of lunch time clubs available to pupils and suggesting pupil well-being days. During these well-being days, pupils can take part in a range of activities including mountain biking, rock climbing, animal care and martial arts. These activities provide experiences that might not ordinarily be available to pupils. In addition, the school council has overseen the creation of a memorial garden to remember a past teacher.

In addition to the support provided by class teachers and learning support assistants, the school's well-being team offer a range of services to pupils and parents, where appropriate. The attendance and family engagement officer supports parents in ensuring the regular attendance of pupils.

The education social worker is a well-established role at the school and provides a valuable link between the school and colleagues in children's services. In addition, and in conjunction with colleagues from children's services the school has

established an after-school club for care experienced children. These pupils have attended theatre productions, learned about self-defence and attended local events including a Christmas parade. This has enabled these pupils to develop trusting working relationships with staff and enabled them to settle well into school.

The school provides a broad range of interventions and these support pupils well in developing a range of valuable skills. For example, in recognising and understanding social cues, initiating, and responding to others in conversations. In addition, pupils are supported in developing a better understanding of their emotions, the emotions of others and how best to respond to these. Overall, for many pupils this support is having a positive impact on their confidence and outcomes.

Due to their previously fragmented education, and their ALN, a few pupils on the Velindre and Theodore Road sites find it difficult to adapt to new situations. They have low self-esteem and struggle to consistently respond appropriately to situations that they find challenging. The behaviour of a few pupils on the Velindre and Theodore Road sites disrupts the learning of other pupils.

The organisation of the curriculum and class grouping has very recently been amended at the Theodore Road site. Classes have been organised according to pupil need as opposed to age. There is a strong focus on developing the confidence of pupils by providing them with a range of off-site, informal learning experiences. In addition to building confidence, pupils are beginning to develop trusting and meaningful relationships with other pupils and staff. It is too early to judge the impact of this provision on pupils learning and well-being needs.

The school is in the process of transferring statements of SEN to the new statutory IDPs. One-page profiles very helpfully capture pupils' like and dislikes. The school works effectively with parents, pupils and where appropriate a range of agencies to determine appropriate provision for pupils. However, the school does not always have a clear enough understanding of the meaning of technical terminology contained in reports from specialists or what this means for the provision that they have to make.

The school, with the support of the careers officer, provides a range of very useful opportunities and experiences for pupils to become more familiar with their options in planning for when they leave school. These include visits from guest speakers and trips to the local college. More recently a careers fair was held at the school. Pupils prepared their curriculum vitae (CVs) and had mock interviews with local employers.

The school has a strong safeguarding culture. Staff receive appropriate training and support from the designated safeguarding leads. They take advice from partners when they need to and ensure that responses to their concerns are provided in a timely manner. The school makes effective use of information shared by external partners to amend, adapt, and bring forward topics that are taught. The planning of the safeguarding curriculum is suitably broad and well matched to the ability needs of pupils.

Leadership and management

The headteacher, ably supported by the senior leadership team, has embedded an inclusive ethos across Ysgol Hendrefelin. This is captured in the school's vision, 'learning today for a better tomorrow'. Leaders model positive behaviours effectively and work well together. As a result, there is strong team collaboration across the school. A notable strength of the school is the way in which leaders at all levels actively promote pupils' well-being.

Leaders have established a strong safeguarding culture. Staff and governors are clear about their responsibilities in safeguarding pupils and demonstrate a robust understanding of the processes in place to keep pupils safe.

Leaders' work in addressing national priorities is effective. The school has implemented the Curriculum for Wales successfully and the whole-school approach to developing pupils' emotional well-being is having a substantial positive impact on the emotional well-being and attitudes to learning of nearly all pupils. Leaders have identified improving attendance as a priority area.

Senior leaders nurture, support and develop staff at all levels successfully. There are clear lines of accountability and line management arrangements, which focus well on support and development. Arrangements for performance management are robust and are closely aligned with the school's priorities for improvement. Objectives are specific and measurable and support school improvement priorities well.

Leaders ensure that there are effective mechanisms to support the well-being of all staff. Staff feel they are appreciated and empowered to carry out their roles. This has led to a strong team ethos and has created a beneficial culture of continuous improvement.

Leaders ensure a range of useful professional learning opportunities for all staff, which supports the school well in securing improvements in many areas. For example, the range and quality of professional learning have led to the improved well-being of most pupils and has begun to improve the reading skills of identified pupils.

The school has a clear and well-structured calendar of activities to gain first-hand evidence about the quality of teaching and learning and to ensure progress towards the school's priority areas. The headteacher has begun to strengthen the role of senior and middle leaders. For example, leaders at all levels participate in a range of monitoring activities, including work scrutiny, learning walks and listening to learners. Many leaders are beginning to analyse and evaluate data and other available information suitably to inform strategic planning. However, this is not fully embedded across the school.

Leaders generally demonstrate a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development at the school. Leaders set out clear expectations for quality in various key aspects, such as support for developing pupils' emotional well-being and delivering activities that promote and improve pupils' reading skills.

Leaders identify accurate priorities for development. For example, they have identified improving the attendance of pupils as an area for development. In addition, they have identified improving pupils' skills in managing their behaviour as a priority area on the Theodore Road and Velindre sites. Leaders have been successful in securing significant improvements. For example, the school has developed a consistent approach to planning, and assessment information is used well to inform the next steps in pupils' learning. In addition, leaders have successfully improved the quality of questioning by staff to support and challenge pupils' learning across the school. The school has made suitable progress in addressing the recommendations from the last inspection.

Leaders have developed effective working relationships with parents and carers who are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Leaders have developed a highly effective culture of parents and carers as partners in the education of their child. As a result, many parents feel that they are fully included in the community of the school and have a strong understanding about their child's progress and well-being.

Governors are supportive of, and knowledgeable about, the work of the school. The governing body fulfils its statutory obligations and takes full account of relevant legislation and guidance. The headteacher, supported by other leaders and staff, provides a comprehensive and detailed termly report, which provides important evidence for governors about the work of the school. In addition, governors visit the school regularly. They participate in a range of quality assurance activities, including learning walks, listening to learners and work scrutiny. As a result, they have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and contribute purposefully to the setting of the school's strategic priorities. The governing body provides an appropriate balance of support and challenge in its role as a 'critical friend'. Governors have appropriate arrangements to promote healthy eating and drinking.

The headteacher, bursar and governors monitor the school's finances well to ensure that all spending is closely aligned with development priorities. Grant funding, including the pupil development grant, is used effectively to support the well-being and progress of pupils who are eligible for free school meals and those from low-income households.

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)

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:

Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to publications@estyn.gov.wales

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