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Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

Maesgwyn Special School
Cwmdare Road
Cwmdare
Aberdare
RCT
CF44 8RE
United Kingdom

Date of inspection: October 2014

by

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

During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the school's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

The report was produced in accordance with Section 28 of the Education Act 2005.

Publication date: 23/12/2014

Context

Maesgwyn Special School is situated on the outskirts of Aberdare and is maintained by Rhondda Cynon Taf Borough Council. It is a special school for pupils with a range of complex educational needs. These needs include moderate learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders.

The school currently has 118 pupils on roll aged from 11 to 19 years. There are 94 boys and 24 girls. All the pupils have a statement of special educational needs.

The school is divided into 11 classes. There are four key stage 3 classes, four key stage 4 classes and three post-16 classes. Two of these classes provide additional specialised support.

English is the predominant language of all pupils. There are a very few pupils from Welsh speaking homes. There are no pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and no pupils receive support for English as an additional language.

Thirteen per cent of pupils have 'looked-after child' (LAC) status. Approximately 63% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This is considerably higher than local and national averages.

Recent improvements to the facilities include a skill centre for teaching construction skills, an allotment for horticulture and an animal care centre.

The school was last inspected in December 2008. The headteacher has been in post since 2005 and the senior assistant headteacher has been in post since 2011.

Summary

The school's current performance	**Good**
The school's prospects for improvement	**Good**

Current performance

Maesgwyn Special School is a good school because:

- pupils make good progress in relation to their individual learning needs;
- pupils achieve improved personal and social skills as they progress through the school;
- all school leavers move on to colleges of further education, work-based training or employment;
- staff work closely with parents and carers to promote the wellbeing of all pupils; and
- the school provides a broad curriculum that meets individual pupils' assessed needs, abilities and interests.

Prospects for improvement

The school has good prospects for improvement because:

- there is a suitable management structure and lines of accountability are clear;
- staff are highly motivated to provide the best possible education for the pupils;
- all staff work very effectively as a team;
- all staff have appropriate professional development opportunities that link well to school priorities; and
- the school manages its resources well to provide good value for money.

Recommendations

R1 Identify and provide suitable opportunities for all pupils to develop their numeracy skills across the curriculum

R2 Use data more effectively to analyse pupil performance and set targets for improvement

R3 Ensure that self-evaluation processes identify strengths and areas for development accurately and lead to school improvement targets that are reviewed regularly

R4 Improve the opportunities for pupils to work alongside their peers in mainstream schools and colleges

What happens next?

The school will draw up an action plan which shows how it is going to address the recommendations. The local authority will monitor the school's progress.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?	Good

Standards: Good

Pupils who attend Maesgwyn Special School have a wide range of educational, behavioural and emotional needs. Many pupils join the school with limited literacy skills. However, at Maesgwyn School over time, the pupils develop the skills necessary to access the curriculum. This enables them to make significant progress in line with their needs and abilities.

Programmes of study are individually tailored and it is not appropriate to compare the standards that pupils achieve with national averages, or to analyse trends.

There is no significant difference between the progress of boys and girls, pupils who are eligible for free school meals, or pupils who are in the care of the local authority.

All pupils at key stage 4 and post-16 gain an extensive range of appropriate qualifications in accredited courses matched to their interests and abilities. These include WJEC Entry Level and GCSE, Agored Cymru, ASDAN, National Open College Network, BTEC, City and Guilds. They also achieve a broad range of informal awards including Duke of Edinburgh Award up to gold level. Pupils, including those with more complex needs, carry out valuable work-experience to prepare them for future employment. These include supported placements in a local garage, pet shop and charity shop.

In lessons, most pupils recall previous learning well. Nearly all pupils are confident to ask and answer questions. A majority of pupils discuss ideas effectively with their peers, sharing opinions and explaining their reasoning. Readers who are less fluent develop effective phonic strategies to make good progress. A few pupils use dictionaries independently to look up the meaning and correct spelling of words. A minority of pupils are confident at reading and spelling more complicated texts. Many pupils read aloud to the teacher with confidence and answer questions correctly based on the text.

Many pupils write effectively for a range of purposes across the curriculum and use higher order thinking skills to plan strategies to complete set tasks. For example, pupils use prior knowledge from geography and science lessons to make connections between the causes and impact of acid rain on the local environment.

A few pupils use their numeracy skills well to estimate and make sensible predictions when budgeting and shopping. Most pupils use measuring equipment efficiently during food technology lessons. School leavers gain a useful range of recognised qualifications in using number and money to prepare them for adult life.

Nearly all pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) very effectively to enhance learning, for example recording and evaluating progress at the end of lessons. Many pupils manage and present data efficiently, for example in history and technology lessons, and use a spreadsheet competently to plan for a social event. A few pupils in media studies produce accurate, neatly presented articles for the school magazine.

The use of Welsh is a strong feature of the school. Most pupils read, understand and write Welsh at a level appropriate to their ability and gain recognised qualifications before leaving the school. The more confident pupils use their Welsh effectively outside the classroom, for example when greeting visitors. Most pupils are enthusiastic about the Welsh language and culture.

During the last three years, after achieving a wide range of appropriate external qualifications, all pupils moved on to colleges of further education, work-based training or employment. This is a strength of the school.

Wellbeing: Good

Nearly all pupils show a good understanding of healthy eating and the importance of exercise. They participate with enthusiasm in the health and fitness related activities provided across the curriculum. Nearly all pupils feel safe in school and are aware of what to do if they have concerns.

Attendance has steadily improved during the last three years. Many pupils attend school regularly. Nearly all pupils are punctual for lessons. Most pupils engage well during lessons and demonstrate a good attitude to work. Behaviour across the school is good with most pupils showing respect for each other and for staff. Nearly all pupils across the school respond well to the support and positive behaviour management framework delivered effectively by staff. Most pupils show improved attitudes to learning over time.

Pupils accessing the 'Wellbeing Centre' achieve very good outcomes across a range of co-ordinated interventions. For example, pupils make good progress in developing their self-esteem, self-awareness, confidence and the ability to make and sustain friendships.

The school council operates effectively and pupils participate with enthusiasm and enjoyment. They are proud of their achievements such as introducing a new uniform for senior pupils. Members of the school council successfully negotiated with the local authority to introduce a secondary school menu.

A healthy school committee and range of other appropriate groups enable pupils to play a full role in the life of the school and the wider community. Pupils learn to show respect and care for others through collecting equipment to fill shoe boxes with gifts to send abroad for less privileged children. They also sing carols at a local care home and help in a project to clear up the local environment.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Good

Learning experiences: Good

The school provides a broad range of interesting learning experiences to meet the needs of all learners well. At key stage 4 and post-16, pupils have access to a comprehensive range of options, which lead to relevant qualifications. Courses are selected carefully to respond to pupils' interests and abilities and are a very strong feature of the school's provision.

All key stage 4 pupils have appropriate opportunities for work experience. Pupils in Year 9 and above work with learning coaches to plan suitable individual learning pathways.

The curriculum meets statutory requirements. Schemes of work are in place for all subjects and ensure continuity and progression across year groups. Class groupings meet pupils' needs well.

The school has made good progress in planning for the delivery of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework. However, opportunities for all pupils to develop their numeracy skills across the curriculum are limited. Recently, pupils in key stages 3 and 4 have been grouped according to ability for literacy and numeracy lessons. This practice is starting to have a positive impact on pupil progress.

The school plans very effectively for Welsh across all key stages. Staff enable pupils to develop their Welsh language skills in a wide range of subjects. For example, they supply Welsh vocabulary lists in ICT and food technology lessons. The school promotes the Cwricwlwm Cymreig enthusiastically.

The school provides a wide range of motivating opportunities to help pupils learn about the world outside school. Appropriate vocational courses teach pupils effectively about aspects of sustainability including recycling and organic gardening. The school's global citizenship provision is enriched by regular participation in initiatives such as the Comenius project.

Teaching: Good

Teachers and support staff work together well to meet the individual needs of all pupils. Effective behaviour management and the consistent application of the reward system enable staff to provide a secure learning environment where pupils can make good progress.

Lessons are planned well with a wide range of appropriate tasks and resources. Lessons move at a suitable pace to keep the pupils motivated and maintain their interest. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour and share clear learning objectives with their pupils. They use questioning effectively to make sure that pupils understand the work they are doing.

The school has developed a supportive and positive atmosphere in which pupils can confidently assess their own work and the work of others. This leads to very useful plenary sessions where staff and pupils assess outcomes and establish the next steps for learning.
The school collects a wide range of pupil data and tracks the progress of individual and groups of pupils effectively. They use this information well to plan appropriate learning experiences.

Parents and carers receive regular information about their child's progress and can speak with staff during weekly 'drop in' sessions. Annual reviews and end of year reports meet statutory requirements.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school has effective policies and strategies for promoting care, support and guidance, which make a strong contribution to pupils' learning outcomes and wellbeing. The benefits of a healthy lifestyle, including regular exercise and healthy eating, are promoted effectively through an appropriate range of activities that link well to pupils' interests and abilities.

The school's well-planned personal and social education programme provides pupils with valuable information about global citizenship, sex and relationships education, health education and substance misuse.

Pupils have many opportunities to explore a wide range of moral issues and reflect on their beliefs. For example, pupils develop an understanding of prejudice and discrimination through studying the holocaust and discussing conflict and peace across the world during religious education and history lessons. This is supported by well-planned assemblies that focus on relevant issues.

The school has highly effective arrangements for identifying vulnerable pupils who receive well-targeted support from the multi-disciplinary team at the 'Wellbeing Centre'. This makes a strong contribution to the standards of wellbeing for the majority of pupils in key stage 3. Staff at the centre provide courses to develop parents' understanding of issues that affect their child. These are valued highly by the parents who attend.

The school has effective arrangements for identifying and monitoring pupils' additional learning needs. All pupils have an individual education plan that provides relevant information on pupils' learning needs. However, a few of these plans lack detail and are not used well enough by staff to plan and support pupils' learning.

The careers education programme is well structured. As a result, pupils receive relevant advice and guidance when making option choices in Year 9 and at the end of key stage 4.

The school has effective arrangements for meeting statutory requirements of assessment, recording and reporting.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Learning environment: Good

The school has developed an ethos that is nurturing, supportive and inclusive. Pupils and staff treat each other with respect and the school makes good use of peer mentoring to encourage pupils to understand each other's needs and develop personal social skills. Pupils respond well to staff support and their views are listened to and acted upon. The school has appropriate policies and procedures in place to deal effectively with any form of discrimination.

Classrooms are clean, tidy and well resourced to meet the learning needs of each pupil. Good quality wall displays enhance the learning environment. They are informative and attractive and reflect pupils' work well. There is a good range of resources, which are well matched to pupils' needs and the requirements of the curriculum.

Generally, the school manages the teaching space well to provide appropriate specialist rooms for the delivery of a broad curriculum. The buildings are well maintained and secure. The school makes appropriate use of the grounds to enrich pupils' learning experiences. For example, there are suitable play areas and an allotment area where pupils grow vegetables.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Good

Leadership: Good

The headteacher and senior leaders have high expectations of staff and pupils and provide clear direction to the school. There is an appropriate staffing structure with well-defined and balanced roles for senior staff. All staff work very effectively together as a team. They share the vision of providing pupils with a broad range of stimulating learning opportunities to motivate them and maintain their enthusiasm. There is a range of suitable policies and plans to guide the work of staff.

Staff record and rigorously evaluate a range of useful information on pupil performance. As a result, they have extensive knowledge about individual pupils and are effective in planning work that meets their needs. However, the lack of a single data system means that leaders and managers are not able to make efficient use of data to analyse performance and set targets for improvements at a strategic level.

The headteacher and senior assistant headteacher undertake lesson observations as part of performance management arrangements. The resulting targets for improvement help identify suitable professional development opportunities for staff. However, these do not focus enough on improving pupils' outcomes. Senior managers make effective use of performance management procedures to manage the performance of staff.

The school is responding very effectively to the national wellbeing agenda through its Wellbeing Centre, which is having an extremely positive impact on pupils' attitudes and self-esteem.

Governors are extremely supportive and well informed about the work of the school. As a result of the regular learning walks and classroom observations, governors have an increasing understanding of learners' performance, especially in vocational areas. However, governors do not provide an appropriate level of challenge to the school.

Improving quality: Adequate

Self-evaluation is a well-established part of the school's working life and all staff contribute actively to the process. The school regularly consults with pupils, and takes their views into account when planning for school improvement.

The outcomes of self-evaluation link to improvement planning to give the school targets that focus appropriately on areas that are in need of improvement. However overall, the school is too positive about its performance and it does not highlight all areas in need of improvement.

The school development plan identifies important areas for improvement such as literacy and numeracy. However, leaders and managers do not review progress against the improvement targets rigorously enough or plan strategically for the longer term. There is no clear structure in place to evaluate the impact of school development projects on pupils' achievements.

Curriculum leaders make sure that resources are matched to their set priorities in the areas for which they have responsibility. They plan improvements that are realistic to achieve within the timescale and budgets available. However, their wider role in relation to school improvement is not fully developed. For example, they do not observe teaching, even in the subject areas for which they have lead responsibility.

Staff make good use of their analysis of pupils' performance to set realistic individual targets. They monitor pupils' progress carefully to ensure the targets they set lead to a rise in pupils' standards.

Partnership working: Good

The school works closely with a wide range of organisations. These include local further education colleges, local services, work placements, grant funded projects, voluntary organisations and charities. These partnerships are co-ordinated well to extend and enrich curriculum opportunities and make learning meaningful and accessible to all pupils.

The school works effectively with a range of partners to develop life and work skills for all pupils, including those with more complex needs. Links with local organisations enable pupils to benefit from a range of learning experiences that help them develop their social skills and their understanding of the world of work. Successful arrangements with local tradesmen have led to valuable work-experience placements leading to eventual employment.

In a very few cases, partnerships with other schools result in positive outcomes for learners. For example, in response to an individual pupil's request to rejoin the neighbourhood mainstream school, staff collaborated to support his successful transition. However, links with mainstream settings are limited.
The school's 'Wellbeing Centre' draws together a wide variety of agencies to provide an innovative range of services for pupils and their families. For example, the school plans effectively with the Sure Start project to deliver jointly a young parents' course based at the centre. This initiative has proved very successful at engaging members of the wider community, as well as strengthening relationships with parents and carers.

A supportive 'parent-friends' association provides valuable additional support for the school. For example, it actively benefits the school's global links initiatives through fundraising activities. The global links are a particularly strong feature of the school. Pupils increase their awareness of life in other countries and societies as a result.

Parents and carers greatly appreciate the informal 'drop-in' sessions at the centre. These enable them to discuss any issues or concerns they may have about their child. The centre also provides valuable literacy and numeracy courses for parents and carers. This is a strength of the school.

Resource management: Good

The school manages its resources well to ensure good learning outcomes for the pupils. The well-qualified staff at the school work very well as a team. They know each other's strengths and support each other effectively.

Learning resources are of good quality and relevant to pupils' needs. The recent investment in ICT equipment is having a positive impact on pupils' learning outcomes.

The learning environment is purposeful, making the best use of space and facilities available. Staff are deployed effectively. The school supports the professional development of all staff. As a result of this, the school now has trained counsellors and staff with expertise in nurture, who can support pupils' wellbeing. Other schools benefit from the expertise that these staff have developed. This is a good feature.

In view of the good standards achieved by the pupils, the effective teaching and careful management of resources, the school provides good value for money.

Appendix 1

Stakeholder satisfaction report

Responses to learner questionnaires

Special Questionnaire (Overall)
denotes the benchmark - this is a total of all responses since September 2010.

	Number of responses Nifer o ymatebion		Agree Cytuno	Disagree Anghytuno	Don't know Ddim yn gwybod	
I feel safe in my school.	110		106	4	0	Rwy'n teimlo'n ddiogel yn fy ysgol.
			96%	4%	0%	
			95%	2%	3%	
The school deals well with any bullying.	109		101	8	0	Mae'r ysgol yn delio'n dda ag unrhyw fwlio.
			93%	7%	0%	
			84%	8%	8%	
I know who to talk to if I am worried or upset.	108		104	4	0	Rwy'n gwybod pwy i siarad ag ef/â hi os ydw I'n poeni neu'n gofidio.
			96%	4%	0%	
			93%	3%	4%	
The school teaches me how to keep healthy	110		108	2	0	Mae'r ysgol yn fy nysgu i sut i aros yn iach.
			98%	2%	0%	
			93%	3%	3%	
There are lots of chances at school for me to get regular exercise.	109		97	12	0	Mae llawer o gyfleoedd yn yr ysgol i mi gael ymarfer corff yn rheolaidd.
			89%	11%	0%	
			91%	6%	3%	
I am doing well at school	110		101	9	0	Rwy'n gwneud yn dda yn yr ysgol.
			92%	8%	0%	
			93%	4%	3%	
The teachers and other adults in the school help me to learn and make progress.	109		108	1	0	Mae'r athrawon a'r oedolion eraill yn yr ysgol yn fy helpu i ddysgu a gwneud cynnydd.
			99%	1%	0%	
			98%	1%	1%	
I know what to do and who to ask if I find my work hard.	110		107	3	0	Rwy'n gwybod beth I'w wneud a gyda phwy i siarad os ydw I'n gweld fy ngwaith yn anodd.
			97%	3%	0%	
			94%	2%	3%	
My homework helps me to understand and improve my work in school.	106		60	45	1	Mae fy ngwaith cartref yn helpu i mi ddeall a gwella fy ngwaith yn yr ysgol.
			57%	42%	1%	
			68%	20%	11%	
I have enough books, equipment, and computers to do my work.	107		104	3	0	Mae gen i ddigon o lyfrau, offer a chyfrifiaduron i wneud fy ngwaith.
			97%	3%	0%	
			92%	5%	3%	
Other children behave well and I can get my work done.	107		81	26	0	Mae plant eraill yn ymddwyn yn dda ac rwy'n gallu gwneud fy ngwaith.
			76%	24%	0%	
			81%	14%	5%	
Nearly all children behave well at playtime and lunch time	109		90	19	0	Mae bron pob un o'r plant yn ymddwyn yn dda amser chwarae ac amser cinio.
			83%	17%	0%	
			86%	10%	4%	

Responses to parent questionnaires

The number of responses received were fewer than 10. No data will be shown.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

Elizabeth Ann Dackevych	Reporting Inspector
Anthony Mulcahy	Team Inspector
Phillip Bowker	Team Inspector
Susan Roberts	Team Inspector
Michaela Leyshon	Lay Inspector
Lesley Bush	Peer Inspector
Marie Clare Hopkins	Nominee

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the school and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.uk)

Year groups, the Foundation Phase and key stages

Schools use a common system of numbering year groups from the start of compulsory schooling to 18 years of age. This system emphasises the importance of continuity and eases communication among schools, governing bodies, parents and local authorities.

The following table sets out the age ranges relevant to each year group. For example, Year 1 refers to the group of pupils who reach the age of six and Year 13 is the year group who reach the age of 18 during the academic year.

Primary phase:

Year	N	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Ages	3-4	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8	8-9	9-10	10-11

Secondary phase:

Year	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10	Y11	Y12	Y13
Ages	11-12	12-13	13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18

The Foundation Phase and key stages cover the following year groups:

Foundation Phase	Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 2
Key stage 2	Year 3 to Year 6
Key stage 3	Year 7 to Year 9
Key stage 4	Year 10 and Year 11

Glossary of ALN terms

ADHD: attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

ALN: additional learning needs

ASD: Autistic Spectrum Disorders, includes Asperger's Syndrome

ATR: additional teacher resource

BESD, ESBD or SEBD: Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulties

CoP: Code of Practice

HI: hearing impairment

MSI: multi-sensory impairment

PMLD: profound and multiple learning difficulties

SpLD: specific learning difficulties, including dyslexia

VI: visual impairment