



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

A report on

**Meadowbank Special School
Colwill Rd
Gabalfa
CF14 2QQ**

Date of inspection: November 2019

by

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

About Meadowbank Special School

Meadowbank is a special day school, maintained by Cardiff City Council. It provides education for pupils aged 4 to 11 years. All pupils have statements of special educational needs. The majority of pupils who attend the school have speech, language and communication difficulties.

All pupils live in the Cardiff area and just over one-third are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Currently, there are no looked-after pupils at the school. No pupils speak Welsh as their first language at home. About 47.1% of pupils receive free school meals. This is higher than the national average of 42.3% for special schools.

Many pupils receive input from the speech and language therapy service that is accessed three days a week at the school.

It is not appropriate to compare the standards that pupils achieve at the school with national averages or to analyse the performance trends of groups of pupils over time because of the nature of pupils' special educational needs.

The school, commissioned by the local authority, provides an early years outreach service to all local authority nursery settings in Cardiff. The early communication and language intervention programme (ECLIPS) provides support, advice, and guidance on implementing appropriate strategies in working with young children with speech and language needs. This service was not included in the inspection of Meadowbank school.

The school was last inspected in November 2013. Since this time, it has undergone considerable change. Currently, there are 33 pupils on roll, of which many are new to the school and started in September 2019. A rising number of pupils have special educational needs relating to general learning difficulties, social and emotional needs, and physical and medical needs. All teachers have been in post for less than a year and many teaching assistants are also new to the school.

The senior management team consists of a headteacher and a deputy headteacher. Both were appointed in September 2018.

Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website at the link below.
<http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/Schools/SchoolSearch?lang=en>

Summary

The school is a nurturing and safe environment, which has been particularly important for the recent intake of a large number of new pupils this term. The school has supported nearly all pupils successfully to settle extremely well into their new classes, daily routines, and activities.

Most pupils make suitable progress, across the areas of learning, which is generally in line with targets identified in their individual education plans. Teachers are beginning to use a limited range of broadly appropriate assessment information to better inform planning. However, the overall planning for the co-ordination and progressive development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills is under-developed. In addition the quality and appropriateness of staff feedback to pupils vary significantly.

Over the last two years, the school has experienced a period of significant and challenging change. Leaders continue to face many challenges, but show resilience and are proactive in improving a few important aspects of the school's work. However, the lack of strategic processes and systems operating across the school prevents it from moving forward in a timely manner.

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	Adequate and needs improvement
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Good
Teaching and learning experiences	Adequate and needs improvement
Care, support and guidance	Adequate and needs improvement
Leadership and management	Adequate and needs improvement

Recommendations

- R1 Address the safeguarding concerns identified during the inspection
- R2 Improve the literacy and numeracy skills of all pupils
- R3 Strengthen curriculum planning and ensure that the curriculum builds on the skills of all pupils
- R4 Develop systems to quality assure the work of the school and track pupil progress
- R5 Improve the quality of strategic leadership

What happens next

The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will review the school's progress.

Main findings

Standards: Adequate and needs improvement

With the sensitive support of staff, most pupils make suitable progress across the areas of learning, which is generally in line with targets identified in their individual education plans. Many pupils learn to focus and listen attentively to staff, and most follow simple verbal instructions and pay suitable attention to given tasks. Older and more able pupils understand more complex instructions and generally complete these successfully.

Overall, and where appropriate, pupils develop and apply their oracy skills well. This application ranges from copying sounds and repeating single words, to holding meaningful conversations with staff and other pupils. The recently introduced total communication approach is helping the majority of pupils to develop their communication skills well. These pupils enjoy using sign language and take pride in demonstrating new words and phrases. However, the inconsistent use of signing by staff at the school limits the opportunities for pupils to make further progress in this important skill.

Overall, pupils' writing and reading skills are less well developed than their oracy skills. Pupils use a range of sensory approaches to develop their writing skills, for example through sensory circuits and experiencing mark making in a variety of textures and media. Across the school, this ranges from exploring making marks in the air to forming simple sentences. This approach supports the development of pupils' gross motor skills suitably. However, pupils generally do not develop their finer handwriting skills well enough.

Pupils' reading skills are generally developed in line with their ability. Many younger pupils show interest and enjoyment in a range of visual materials including picture books. They identify objects, shape and colour as well as written text and transfer these skills purposefully to different learning contexts. Nearly all pupils enjoy listening to story time. They respond positively to questions by verbalising, pointing, and acting out, including by dancing or singing. Nearly all older pupils use written or visual sequencing cues very well to chart aspects such as the life cycle of a flower and the story of the birth of Christ. Overall, pupils' Welsh language development is limited.

Overall, pupils develop their numeracy skills suitably. Nearly all younger pupils sort numbers one to ten confidently and match shapes accurately. Around half of these pupils write the numbers one to six independently and can select the appropriate number of objects for each numerical value. As part of a traffic survey, older pupils design their own data capture sheets effectively. They use tally charts well to record the different type of travel used by people in the local area. They analyse their results and the data in a range of appropriate and meaningful ways, for example by using bar and pie charts.

Pupils across the school are beginning to develop their information and communication technology (ICT) skills appropriately. For example, around half of pupils use an electronic tablet to record different aspects of their learning

competently. They are enthusiastic in providing a commentary on their work and annotating what they have learned. This approach is helping pupils to begin to reflect on their progress and, where appropriate, the progress of their peers. Pupils share their work with their parents electronically and this enables parents to have a better understanding of their child's work and the progress that they make.

As a result of well-established routines, most pupils become increasingly independent across a range of skill areas. For example, nearly all pupils remove wet weather clothing and the majority hang these up. In addition, most pupils make choices for their breakfast and lunch, clear up after themselves and place crockery, waste food and recycling materials in the appropriate place. All pupils develop their fine motor skills suitably in different contexts, such as by using scissors to cut out objects and peeling a range of vegetables to make soup.

Most pupils develop their social skills well and interact with one another purposefully. They show respect for staff, fellow pupils and the school environment. Pupils develop their confidence to communicate sensitively with visitors to the school. Over time, many pupils learn the importance of active listening, turn taking and negotiation. They learn to share attention and resources, and develop confidence to work independently and in small groups. In a very few cases, pupils develop meaningful friendships that they maintain outside of school.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Nearly all pupils feel safe and secure and display confidence in and around the school. Many pupils are new to the school and have settled well and established valuable working relationships with staff in their classes in a relatively short period of time. The majority of pupils move around the school and between activities well, including moving to outside learning spaces and other areas around the school grounds.

Most pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is exemplary. They show a genuine care and understanding of the needs of others, for example by checking that a friend is sitting safely on a chair and able to engage in the activity.

Nearly all pupils display a positive attitude to their learning. A majority of pupils are keen to communicate their experiences and their enjoyment of school life. Nearly all pupils engage positively and enthusiastically in activities with external providers and are encouraging of each other's efforts. Many pupils work collaboratively in pairs and small groups and are patient when taking turns. However, a few pupils have difficulty sustaining their engagement so that they remain on task for appropriate periods of time.

A minority of younger pupils are resilient and show perseverance in their learning. For example, in a water play activity they find ways to replace water that has been splashed out of the tray.

Many pupils are beginning to make decisions about what they are taught and developing their responsibilities for influencing the work of the school, such as through deciding the new school logo. However, overall, pupils do not develop their leadership skills fully, as they do not have sufficient opportunities to do so.

Many pupils participate in the outdoor learning environment well. They enjoy the wide range of physical activities throughout the school day. For example they enjoy climbing on the pirate ship in the yard, play ball games and enjoy splashing in water or stomping in mud. Nearly all older pupils participate in the daily mile eagerly and confidently, taking turns to choose how they complete the activity, by running, hopping or jumping. Older pupils are aware of the effect of physical exercise on their bodies such as increasing their heart rates, and they are developing a secure understanding of healthy lifestyles. Across the school, most pupils develop a suitable understanding of the importance of being healthy and, relative to their needs and abilities, make appropriate choices.

Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement

Overall, most staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and participation in learning. As a result, most pupils engage eagerly in the school routines throughout the day.

Overall, in the majority of classes where teaching is effective, pupils' personal targets lead to clear learning objectives, ensuring that individual needs are met. Many staff use questioning well and this allows pupils to improve and extend their learning. As a result, the pace of learning is well matched to the individual needs of pupils.

The school is developing a thematic approach to planning the curriculum based on the foundation phase philosophy and its seven areas for learning. Overall, teachers' planning provides an appropriate range of learning experiences in these areas for pupils. Most staff are developing a range of exciting experiences for pupils that are based around pupils' previous learning, interests and motivation. For example, younger pupils' learning is based around a topic on bears and older pupils have recently influenced and explored their learning through the rugby world cup.

Teachers and teaching assistants generally identify suitable opportunities within sessions to promote learning, develop communication and model purposeful activity. For example, singing 'Humpty Dumpty' provides an appropriate opportunity for a group of pupils to improve a wide range of communication skills, including appropriate eye contact, sharing adult attention and enjoyment. However, teachers' planning across the school is inconsistent. For example, planning does not always ensure that teaching assistants are deployed consistently well to support the wide ranging learning needs of pupils.

Staff are beginning to use a small range of broadly appropriate assessment information to better inform planning. Most recently, staff use ongoing assessments of pupils' learning to share these findings with one another and provide more purposeful feedback to pupils. However, this development is at an early stage, and more generally the quality and appropriateness of feedback to pupils vary significantly.

The school makes good use of the outdoor learning environment. This offers opportunities for pupils to develop their independence skills. In addition, the sensory needs of pupils are accommodated in a structured way. As a result, pupils develop their physical, tactile movement and problem solving skills. The school provides worthwhile opportunities for pupils to collaborate with other pupils and develop appropriate independence skills.

Across the school, there are relevant planned opportunities to develop pupils' communication skills across a range of contexts, for example in structured circle times and through skills focused sessions. Wider experiences, including workshops with the Welsh National Opera and trips to the beach, offer different contexts to apply individual skills. For example, pupils recently applied a range of decision-making, problem solving and directional skills in the local area to discover a missing crocodile that they had encountered in a story.

The overall planning and co-ordination for the progressive development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are under-developed. Opportunities for pupils to enhance their use of Welsh language and identify with the Welsh culture are also limited.

Care, support and guidance: Adequate and needs improvement

Meadowbank is a safe and nurturing school. Many pupils are new to the school, and staff have supported pupils extremely well to settle in their new classes, daily routines, and activities.

The school's working relationships with parents are strong. In a relatively short amount of time, the school has forged positive links with parents, particularly for the high number of new pupils who joined the school in September. The school offers a wide range of effective systems to share information with parents such as home schoolbooks and the use of different forms of social media.

All pupils have a statement of special educational needs and individual education plans, and there is a suitable range of targets for many pupils. These plans include very helpfully strategies to support staff in providing relevant learning experiences to meet the needs of pupils.

The school is beginning to collect a range of useful data in relation to pupils' initial starting points at the school. In addition, it has a small range of progress information on pupils who have been at the school for more than a year, including targets contained in individual education plans. However, the overall systems to track and monitor the progress of pupils are currently under-developed.

The school's behaviour policy provides appropriate guidance to staff, including strategies such as the use of school rules and rewards for pupils. However, the policy is not used consistently, particularly when rewarding pupils for preferred behaviours.

Staff encourage pupils to make healthy lifestyle choices. During break and lunch times, staff support pupils to choose a balanced and healthy meal. This can be particularly challenging for pupils with established foods that they can and cannot tolerate. However, staff persevere in encouraging pupils to broaden their experiences in a supportive approach.

Opportunities for pupils to make decisions in the school are developing. For example, pupils have recently had an input into deciding learning themes and in developing the new school logo. The very recently established school council is supporting the development of pupils as leaders, but it is not fully representative of the school population. Overall, pupils do not have enough opportunities to develop their leadership skills.

The school promotes the pupils' understanding of the values of tolerance and respect well, which are appropriate to their understanding and abilities. Staff provide valuable role models for the pupils and reinforce these values well through teaching activities and whole-school and class assembly times.

The school is beginning to develop appropriate approaches that support the broader social and emotional needs of the pupils currently on roll. The personal and social education programme is also in the early stages of revision to meet pupils' needs more effectively. It is too early to evaluate the impact that these initiatives have had on pupils' wellbeing and standards.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils generally meet requirements. However, a small number of issues were brought to the attention of the school during the inspection.

Leadership and management: Adequate and needs improvement

Over the last two years, the school has experienced a period of significant and challenging changes to staffing and the senior leadership team, as well as the numbers and range of needs of pupils at the school. The current leadership team has developed a sound vision and a strong sense of purpose based on addressing these challenges and supporting all pupils to achieve and flourish.

During the last year, leaders have shown resilience and have been proactive in improving a few important aspects of the school's work. However, the priorities identified for improvement during this time have often been over-shadowed by historic issues relating to the long term role of the school and have distracted leaders from making and implementing effective strategic plans for improvement.

The distribution of current leadership responsibilities is at a very early stage of development. Roles and responsibilities of the headteacher and deputy headteacher are unclear, with both leaders having too wide a range of day-to-day responsibilities. This heavy distribution impacts on the time that they have to make and plan for effective strategic decisions. For example, arrangements for quality assuring provision, tracking the progress that pupils make and performance management processes are at early stages of development.

Leaders have recently strengthened the development of effective self-evaluation processes and the school's improvement planning. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of this work.

Around half of the members of the governing body are new. Working together, the governors provide a range of expertise to support improvement across the school. They are committed to securing the long-term future of the school and to supporting leaders to move the school forward. However, it is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of the governing body in supporting and challenging leaders at the school.

The recent introduction of regular staff meetings and training opportunities are beginning to develop staff capabilities and understanding of the needs of pupils that now attend the school. Training events focus appropriately on improving pupils'

access to the curriculum and the development of a whole-school approach to 'total communication'. These development opportunities are beginning to have a positive impact on teaching and learning at the school.

Copies of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from parent and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teaching, support staff and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee, where appropriate
- visit lessons and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs
- 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' wellbeing, 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:

- reviews 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)

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

Excellent	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
Adequate and needs improvement	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths

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

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