



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

A report on

**Rydal Penrhos
Pwllcrochan Avenue
Colwyn Bay
Conwy
LL29 7BT**

Date of inspection: March 2020

by

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

About Rydal Penrhos

Rydal Penrhos School is an independent boarding and day school for boys and girls from the age of 3 to 18 years. The school is situated in the town of Colwyn Bay in North Wales. The school operates as a charitable trust, established by the Methodist Church, and is an associate school in the Methodist Independent Schools Trust.

There are currently 386 pupils on roll. These include 127 in the preparatory school and 259 in the senior school, of whom 85 are in the sixth form.

In the senior school, 42 pupils are boarders. The largest single nationality of boarders is from the United Kingdom and the remainder come from nine other countries around the world.

About 13% of pupils come from minority ethnic groups. Most speak English fluently and fewer than 3% speak Welsh as a first language at home. The school offers additional learning support to around 22% of pupils, mainly to support literacy development or learning English as an additional language. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs.

New pupils may join the school at any stage depending on the availability of spaces. Many pupils in the preparatory school transfer to the senior school. New pupils who wish to join the senior school in Year 7 are assessed in literacy, numeracy and non-verbal reasoning. The school requires pupils wishing to join the sixth form to have five or more GCSEs at grades A*- C or equivalent.

Estyn last inspected the school in 2013. Since this time, the school has restructured its senior management team, which now comprises of an executive headteacher, head of senior school, head of the preparatory school and two deputy headteachers. Each of these appointments were made in 2019.

The school describes its ethos and aim in the following way: 'Rydal Penrhos is an inclusive Christian community, based on a Methodist foundation, dedicated to ensuring that the unique potential of each child and young person is realised.'

Summary

The school provides a caring environment and supports pupils effectively in developing an understanding of their roles and responsibilities as part of a school community. Pupils' high levels of wellbeing and positive attitudes to learning make a considerable contribution to the overall progress that they make.

The school offers a broad range of activities that give pupils engaging and exciting learning experiences outside of the classroom. Teachers form strong working relationships with pupils. However, learning activities do not always challenge and support pupils of different abilities well enough. In addition, pupils are provided too few opportunities to develop their independent learning skills effectively. This limits the progress they make.

The school is emerging from a challenging period and is facing the future with growing confidence. The strategic plans to address issues are at an early stage of implementation.

The school meets all of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

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

Compliance with the regulations for registration

Independent school inspections are governed by the Education Act 2002 and related regulations: the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003. These regulations require an independent school to meet an appropriate standard in the following areas:

The quality of education provided by the school

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The suitability of proprietors and staff

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Premises of and boarding accommodation at schools

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The provision of information

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

The manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school meets the regulatory requirements for this standard.

Recommendations

- R1 Strengthen leadership at all levels across the school
- R2 Strengthen improvement planning processes
- R3 Ensure that teaching challenges and supports all pupils consistently
- R4 Improve the quality of teachers' feedback so that pupils understand where and how they can improve their work

What happens next

Estyn advises the proprietor to amend its current development plan to show what actions the school intends to take in response to the recommendations. It is also advisable to circulate this plan, or a summary of it, to all parents/carers at the school.

Main findings

Standards: Good

During their time at the school, many pupils make strong progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills and this prepares them well for the next stage of their education or employment.

Most pupils recall their previous learning swiftly and accurately, and they apply it well to their current context. This helps them in making good progress in their understanding of new concepts and topics. Many senior school pupils are particularly adept at applying their knowledge confidently in unfamiliar situations. In a minority of lessons, pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable. Often this is because tasks do not match their ability well enough or there is not a suitable level of challenge.

Throughout the school, most pupils speak clearly and listen attentively to their teachers and peers. Pupils in reception talk enthusiastically about their experiences of a visit to a farm and share information confidently. In Year 6, most pupils express their ideas clearly in discussions. For example, they realise that beginning school early is a contentious issue and that many pupils may work better with a later start. In the senior school, many pupils express their views assuredly, such as in the Edward's house chapel when sixth form pupils conveyed effectively the many benefits of being a boarding pupil. However, a few pupils do not speak at length during class discussions. These pupils offer only brief responses to questions and do not take the opportunity to develop their ideas and express their own views.

Most pupils develop their reading skills effectively throughout the school. In Year 3, most pupils recall accurately the main characters and events in 'Fantastic Mr Fox', and many make plausible predictions about what may happen next in the text. By the end of Year 6, most pupils have strong reading skills, they read fluently and with technical accuracy. In the senior school, most pupils use appropriate strategies to extract information from texts effectively, such as facts about the working conditions in Victorian Britain. When given the opportunity, senior school pupils use higher order reading skills, such as deduction, successfully.

The writing skills of most pupils develop suitably in the preparatory school. In Year 2, many pupils write sequences of sentences to tell a story or explain an idea appropriately. However, they do not always spell common words accurately, and a minority do not demarcate sentences with full-stops and capital letters consistently enough. By Year 6, many pupils write accurately. They are beginning to use engaging sentence starters to capture the interest of the reader, for example 'Only a fool would believe'. Most structure their writing effectively, and give worthwhile reasons for their opinions when constructing a written argument. For example, they explain the negative impact of plastics in the ocean as a reason for reducing their use.

In the senior school, most pupils write well. They have high levels of technical accuracy, express themselves clearly and take pride in their presentation. These

pupils use a wide vocabulary and sophisticated language to good effect. Pupils have a firm understanding of different types of writing and use language and tone effectively for different purposes. For example dystopian stories written by Year 9 are unsettling, thought provoking and evocative.

The numeracy skills of most pupils are secure in the preparatory school. In Year 6, many pupils have good mental calculation skills, they multiply quickly and accurately. Most pupils have a secure understand of measure and use this well in everyday contexts. For example, they identify accurately whether objects need to be measured in metres or centimetres. Many pupils rapidly develop secure numeracy skills in the senior school. Many Year 9 pupils carry out mathematical operations accurately, applying these skills to real life situations competently, for example using percentages to determine VAT on a new microwave. Year 10 pupils apply their numeracy skills effectively in biology when drawing graphs to show the relationship between the rate of photosynthesis and temperature, carbon dioxide or light.

Many senior school pupils develop their thinking skills suitably. For example, pupils in Year 9 consider from different perspectives whether the natural resources of Antarctica should be protected or economically exploited. In economics sixth form, pupils give thoughtful consideration to the factors that have influenced the gender pay gap over time.

Across the school, pupils' creative skills are well developed and many are keen to explore different forms of expression. This is illustrated clearly by the impactful artwork displayed across the school.

Overall, pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills are not developed well enough. In Year 6, most pupils have a beneficial understanding of a suitable range of programmes. They can confidently present information, import graphics and use slide transitions accurately. Most pupils use word processing and desk-top publishing packages purposefully. However, in the senior school pupils do not make sufficient progress in using ICT programmes to carry out more complex activities.

Most pupils in the preparatory school and in Year 7 and Year 8 are developing worthwhile Welsh language oral skills.

The standards pupils reach at the end of key stage 4 are secure. In each of the last three years, pupils' overall performance in the core subjects has greatly exceeded national averages. Over the same time period, many pupils have achieved the level 2 threshold (equivalent to five GCSEs at grades A* to C) including English and mathematics. There has been a fluctuation in the percentage of pupils achieving five or more passes at the highest A*/A (or equivalent) grades. However, this figure has remained above the national average.

For the last three years, at the end of Year 11 no pupil has left the school without a recognised qualification, and nearly all pupils remained in full-time education.

In the sixth form, pupils' overall performance at A level has been above national averages in two of the last three years and broadly in line in the third. In 2017 and

2018, the percentages of grades at A*/A and A*/B have been well above national averages and broadly in line with those of similar schools. In 2019, these grades were broadly in line with national averages. At the end of Year 13, almost all pupils progress to higher education.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Pupils' high levels of wellbeing and positive attitudes to learning make a considerable contribution to the mature approach they have to their work and the overall progress that they achieve.

Nearly all pupils are polite, well-mannered and caring, and most treat their peers and adults with respect. Both within and beyond the classroom, most pupils behave well and are welcoming to visitors to the school. Most pupils have a strong awareness of the needs of others, both within their own school community and further afield. For example, the preparatory school council recently instigated a worthwhile fundraising activity to support those affected by the Australian bushfires.

Across all age groups, nearly all pupils enjoy participating in a broad range of extra-curricular clubs and activities such as chess, public speaking and scrabble. Most pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves healthy through regular exercise and a balanced diet. They embrace the school's outdoor education programme and participate with great enthusiasm in an extensive range of sporting activities, such as football, cricket, tennis and netball.

Nearly all pupils feel safe, secure and well cared for. Most pupils understand the importance of staying safe online and know who to turn to if they have a concern. Many are confident that the school deals with their worries effectively.

Most pupils have a clear understanding of sustainability, global awareness and the importance of recycling. They also understand and respect people from other backgrounds and traditions, and make secure progress towards developing successfully as tolerant and caring citizens. For example, sixth form pupils delivered an assembly to raise awareness of LGBTQ+ issues.

Most pupils are attentive and engaged and participate willingly in learning activities. They are curious, confident and resilient learners. For example, during forest school sessions, reception class pupils work collaboratively and support their peers effectively when completing a group task, building birds' nests from natural materials. However, across the school, a few pupils are too passive and choose not to take an active role during the course of a lesson

Throughout the school, pupils respond eagerly and diligently to opportunities to take on responsibility, thus developing valuable leadership skills. For example, when members of the girls' boarding house delivered an inspiring assembly about community living. There is strong pupil leadership, which includes roles in sporting teams, school council, and the eco-committee and as prefects. Pupils are confident that they are able to influence change in the school. For example, the preparatory school council were given a budget to resource the library and consulted other pupils on book preferences. In the senior school a pupil was instrumental in establishing the 'put in to the pupils' forum. Many believe that the school listens to their opinions and acts upon them suitably.

As they progress through the school, most pupils become confident, capable and conscientious learners. They work cooperatively in pairs and small groups such as when undertaking practical experiments in science, and they are respectful of each other's views. However, a minority of pupils lack independence and are too reliant on the teacher for support.

Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement

The school provides a curriculum that is broad, balanced and meets the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

Within the curriculum, the school offers a highly beneficial range of activities that give pupils engaging and exciting learning experiences outside of the classroom. For example, in the preparatory school pupils enjoy rock-climbing, sailing and the forest school. In the senior school, pupils take part enthusiastically in activities such as skiing and canoeing. In addition, the school provides an extensive range of extra-curricular activities, including yoga, filmmaking and golf. These activities help to broaden pupils' learning experiences and contribute well to their personal development.

The school has beneficial long-term planning in place that helps to structure the curriculum effectively as pupils move through the school. The curriculum plans build systematically on pupils' knowledge and skills to help ensure suitable progression. However, in the preparatory school, teachers do not always use these plans well enough to deliver learning experiences that build consistently on pupils' skills and experiences. Further, in the preparatory school and in key stage 3, an over-reliance on worksheets and workbooks reduces pupils' ability to develop their independent learning skills.

In the senior school, leaders consider pupils' future goals well when planning the curriculum. As a result of the worthwhile range of programmes offered, most key stage 4 and sixth form pupils are able to access courses that provide effective provision and valuable qualifications. In the senior school, teachers also provide beneficial careers guidance to help pupils understand and access the opportunities available to them.

The school provides suitable opportunities for pupils to develop Welsh language skills up to Year 8. In the early part of the preparatory school, lessons build systematically on pupils' skills. As a result, most pupils engage enthusiastically and progress successfully. Provision continues appropriately for older pupils in the preparatory school and into the senior school.

Throughout the school, nearly all teachers form strong working relationships with pupils. This approach helps pupils to feel comfortable that they can ask questions and discuss their learning confidently. A majority of teachers provide clear and useful explanations of difficult concepts. For example, in the senior school, when explaining the psychological risk factors linked with addiction. A majority of teachers ask purposeful questions that help pupils to develop their thinking and extend their understanding. However, teachers do not always ensure that activities challenge and support pupils of different abilities well enough. As a result, a minority of pupils do not consistently make enough progress in these lessons. In addition, a minority of teachers do not always give pupils enough opportunities to direct their own learning or develop their independent learning skills effectively.

In lessons, many teachers provide pupils with useful oral feedback that helps them to know how well they are doing and where they can make improvements to their work. However, in a majority of cases, teachers' written feedback is not helpful in identifying how and where pupils could improve. Where comments are useful, few teachers ensure that pupils heed the comments and take action to improve their work.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The school provides a caring environment for its pupils. Staff support pupils effectively in developing a strong understanding of their roles and responsibilities as part of the school community. As a result, most pupils behave well, and are respectful, tolerant and considerate of others.

Throughout the school, staff provide valuable opportunities for pupils to understand the benefits of leading a healthy lifestyle through taking regular exercise and having an appropriate diet. The food forum has worked well with the school to provide healthy food choices at meal times. The school provides pupils with a very wide range of fitness activities, including ballet and circuit training, with high levels of take-up.

The school has beneficial provision to develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. This provision also assists pupils to explore and develop their understanding of aspects and issues related to diversity, tolerance, and respect for others. It includes an effective personal and social education programme, the anti-bullying policy and practice, assemblies, visits and specific topical events. This aspect is enhanced further from the training staff have received as mental health first aiders, the work of a counsellor and sessions in mindfulness and yoga.

Curricular and extra-curricular learning experiences help pupils to develop their cultural and social awareness, and to appreciate their personal responsibilities towards others. Pupils have useful opportunities to take part in regular charity work, for example, through a project supporting the building of schools in Uganda. Through this work, pupils gain a sound awareness of people less fortunate than themselves which contributes effectively to their development as ethical and informed citizens.

In the preparatory school staff track pupils' literacy and numeracy skills carefully. This information helps leaders to have an overall understanding of the standards and progress of pupils and to report to parents. However, this information is not always used well enough by teachers in planning the next steps in learning. In the senior school teachers complete useful half-termly progress checks. The outcomes of these reports are used suitably by pupils to reflect on their progress and set targets for improvement with the support of pastoral and academic staff. Following this process, a range of beneficial support and interventions may be agreed such as additional subject help, study skills training, mentoring or counselling.

The school has sound arrangements for the identification of pupils who need additional support. There is a range of appropriate support and intervention based on the level of need for pupils with English as an additional language, basic skills deficits, anxiety or specific learning needs. This support includes in-class help, one-

to-one teaching, and support from external agencies such as speech and language therapists. The lead teachers for additional learning needs in the preparatory and senior schools review provision for individuals regularly and thoroughly. They make effective use of the pupil development planning process to involve pupils, parents, teachers and external agencies to set specific individual targets. As a result, most pupils who need additional support make good progress over time.

Pupils have a wide range of valuable opportunities to show leadership and develop as active citizens. For example, through membership of school council and the food forum, as sports captains, and as buddies for younger pupils or those new to the school. Pupils make valuable contributions to the running of events and lead school assemblies confidently. The school councils are clear about their role and enthusiastic about being able to influence policy and practice in the school. For example, the senior school council is involved in the development of a new behaviour policy. However, pupils have limited opportunities to influence how and what they learn.

The school has useful arrangements to involve and inform parents about the education of their child and events in the life of the school. These include performances, sporting events, trips to the theatre and social and transition events. The school ensures that parents receive detailed information about their child's progress and the importance of regular attendance. As a result of a consultation with parents this year, the school is revising how it communicates about significant changes affecting the school and the arrangements for raising concerns. This work is at an early stage of development.

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

Leadership and management: Adequate and needs improvement

The school is emerging from a challenging period and is facing the future with growing confidence.

The governing body provides effective and astute strategic leadership. It sets out its vision and mission clearly as an inclusive Christian community, based on a Methodist foundation that is dedicated to realising the unique potential of each pupil. There is a strong commitment throughout the school to promoting these Christian values and achieving these aims. In the last two years, decisive action has been taken to address concerns relating primarily to declining pupil numbers and a challenging financial situation.

The governing body has implemented a comprehensive plan and a broad range of actions in response to concerns about aspects of provision, a decline in pupil numbers and threats to the school's financial stability. These strategic changes include ending boarding provision, shortening the school day and discontinuation of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme. In addition, the governors appointed an executive principal as well as new headteachers in both the senior and preparatory sections to implement this strategy and instigate necessary improvements in the school's work.

Since his appointment, the executive principal has provided assured, authoritative and reflective leadership. He has reorganised the leadership team and established a faculty structure to rationalise leadership roles and support curriculum developments. This approach is helping to delegate responsibilities more effectively and build leadership capacity. Together with the headteachers of the senior and preparatory schools, he is providing appropriate direction, setting out clear expectations and beginning to establish suitable oversight of all areas of the school's work. However, these developments are at an early stage with a few key positions remaining vacant.

Senior leaders are implementing an evolving programme of monitoring activities that include lesson observations and book reviews, as well as departmental evaluations. These activities are helping to promote staff self-reflection and to identify relevant areas for improvement in aspects of learning and provision. However, at present these activities are not embedded or sufficiently robust. Lesson observations lack rigour and do not focus closely enough on pupils' progress and the development of their skills. Further, over time, leadership at all levels has not been successful in supporting staff effectively and holding them to account for the quality of their work, particularly in improving provision and raising standards. As a result, there is not a sufficiently sharp and focused emphasis across the school on improving the quality of teaching and learning and on promoting the development of pupils' skills.

The school has recently introduced a useful programme of professional learning workshops that is helping to promote good practice. Staff professional learning objectives are identified appropriately and are related to school improvement priorities. However, these approaches are at a very early stage. Since the last inspection, there has not been a strong professional learning culture and initiatives in this area have not had sufficient impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

Shortcomings in the management of school finances have contributed to a challenging budgetary situation. The head of finance, together with the resources committee, now monitors budgets carefully. Together, they are taking necessary action to streamline services, secure efficiencies and reduce expenditure.

The school meets all of the Independent School Standards (Wales) Regulations 2003.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from parent and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and support staff 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/proprietor(s), leaders 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
- visit lessons and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning
- 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 had 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 (where appropriate), 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:

- 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)

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 163 of the Education Act 2002. The main purpose of inspection under this section is to report on compliance with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003. In schools that provide non-maintained nursery education, this report also satisfies the requirements of Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

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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