



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

A report on

Cefn Saeson Comprehensive School

**Afan Valley Road
Cimla
Neath
SA11 3TA**

Date of inspection: March 2023

by

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

About Cefn Saeson Comprehensive School

Name of provider	Cefn Saeson Comprehensive School
Local authority	Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Secondary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	834
Pupils of statutory school age	834
Number in sixth form	n/a
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 Secondary is 20.2%)	28.0%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Secondary is 17.8%)	19.4%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	1.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	0.6%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2013
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	16/03/2015
Start date of inspection	20/03/2023

Data reported is sourced from the latest available Pupil Level Annual School Census. These figures may be slightly different to those observed during the inspection. Further information is available from the Welsh Government My Local School website: mylocalschool.gov.wales

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

Overview

Cefn Saeson Comprehensive School is a caring school where staff know pupils well and make them feel valued and safe. Pupils are welcoming and friendly, and many behave well. They benefit from the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities on offer and the pupils involved in the various Senedd groups value the opportunities they have to contribute to the life of the school. However, pupils' attendance is notably low, particularly that of those eligible for free school meals or with additional learning needs (ALN) and the approach to improving attendance is not sufficiently strategic.

Strong working relationships between staff and pupils are a feature of most lessons. In the majority of lessons, teaching enables pupils to make sound progress. In these lessons, teachers plan helpful, suitably challenging activities and monitor pupils' progress well, providing useful verbal feedback. In a minority of cases, teaching is not effective enough, often due to teachers' low expectations. In these cases, pupils do not make enough progress and a minority complete very little work. Although feedback is helpful in a minority of instances, overall feedback and assessment does not provide pupils with sufficient guidance.

Leaders have developed an ambitious strategy for the development of the Curriculum for Wales, though this has not been sufficiently underpinned by a consistent enough focus on improving the effectiveness of teaching. In general, pupils have an appropriately broad curriculum in Years 7 and 8 and a suitable range of options in Key Stage 4. However, provision to develop pupils' Welsh language skills is underdeveloped and a few more able pupils in Year 11 do not have suitable provision for English from January onwards. While there is valuable personal and social education (PSE) provision for younger pupils, this is more limited for older pupils.

The Secondary Education Nurture Centre (SENC) is a Local Authority provision for pupils from across Neath and Port Talbot, which is managed by the school. It provides a safe, constructive environment for pupils with significant social, emotional and mental health needs. These pupils develop useful skills and positive attitudes to learning at the centre, and they generally attend well. Staff in the centre provide a bespoke curriculum for each pupil and work effectively with external agencies to support them.

The school's caring ethos, where every child matters, is promoted successfully by leaders. There is a sound culture of safeguarding and valuable provision for pupils with ALN, such as the Year 7 nurture class. In light of the pandemic, leaders recognised the need to develop their own range of provisions to meet the changing needs of pupils. As a result, there is a broad range of provision to meet the well-being needs of pupils, particularly those who are vulnerable.

The headteacher and other leaders display a heartfelt commitment to the school and its community and have been successful in promoting the well-being and safeguarding of pupils. Despite this, leadership has not had enough impact on other important aspects of the school's work. These include attendance, the quality of teaching and assessment, the provision to develop pupils' skills and access for all pupils to a suitably broad curriculum. Overall, leaders do not evaluate the impact of

their work rigorously enough or focus consistently enough on core aspects of their work. As a result, their actions to effect improvement are not sufficiently precise or effective. In addition, there is too much variation in how robustly senior leaders hold middle leaders to account or support them to develop their leadership skills.

Recommendations

- R1 Strengthen leadership, by improving the rigour and precision of self-evaluation and the effectiveness of improvement planning in particular
- R2 Improve the processes and strategic planning to improve attendance
- R3 Improve the effectiveness of teaching and assessment
- R4 Ensure that all pupils have access to the full breadth of provision, particularly the provision for Welsh, English in Year 11 and PSE in Key Stage 4

What happens next

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school is in need of significant improvement. The school will draw up an action plan to show how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will monitor the school's progress about 12 months after the publication of this report.

Main evaluation

Learning

In a majority of lessons, pupils make sound progress in their knowledge, understanding and skills. They recall prior learning well and apply this to new situations appropriately, for example in science when Year 10 pupils discuss the difference between reflection and refraction or when Year 7 pupils explore the conditions of the slave trade and evaluate source material in history lessons. In a minority of lessons, pupils do not make suitable progress. This is mainly due to shortcomings in teaching, although a minority of pupils are slow to start working and complete little work in their lessons over time.

A majority of pupils are eager contributors to class discussions. These pupils express their opinions confidently and clearly, explaining their viewpoints sensibly and using subject specific vocabulary accurately, for example when they explain the importance of sequencing when coding in their information and communication technology (ICT) lessons. A few pupils express their views particularly maturely, showing confident command of relevant vocabulary and explaining their reasoning intelligently, for example when they discuss how to write a persuasive speech or when they explain what makes an effective film trailer in English. A minority of pupils are reluctant to contribute to discussions or respond to questions, or offer brief, underdeveloped answers. Many pupils listen carefully and with respect, but a few do not listen respectfully to staff or each other.

When reading, many pupils select information from a range of texts appropriately, for example to identify the causes and effects of flooding in geography. A majority read and analyse a variety of texts across the curriculum competently and are developing their annotation skills well. These pupils apply analysis techniques appropriately, identifying suitable evidence to support their points. A minority of pupils struggle to analyse writing style and, to a lesser extent content, and do not employ terminology suitably when analysing texts. A few pupils struggle to annotate texts appropriately and only understand basic meaning when reading. While many pupils generally select suitable information when reading for research purposes on the internet, pupils are not always suitably critical or discerning when doing so.

Many pupils organise their writing suitably by using paragraphs and generally write in a logical sequence. A majority write at length in a suitable range of forms and for an appropriate range of audiences in English. For example, pupils in the Year 7 nurture group write engaging descriptions of their teachers in their English lessons. In subjects other than English, pupils benefit from suitable opportunities to write extended pieces, though they do not always develop the range of their writing skills well enough across the curriculum and booklets sometimes hinder their ability to write at length. A majority of pupils have an appropriate vocabulary and write well creatively, showing awareness of the features of effective writing and how to employ writing devices. A very few pupils employ ambitious vocabulary effectively and vary punctuation and sentence types deftly to create impact. However, a minority of pupils produce very little extended written work, tending only to write a few sentences. These pupils fail to use capital letters and punctuation accurately and make frequent spelling errors. A few pupils have particularly poor handwriting.

In mathematics, most pupils develop their subject specific vocabulary well, for example in Year 7 when they describe a fraction without using particular words or in Year 8 when they explain the properties of regular and irregular polygons. In general, pupils use technical equipment accurately in mathematics, such as when indicating lines of symmetry and drawing shapes. They use the four rules of number well, for example to calculate upper and lower quartiles and solve problems. Although pupils develop their numeracy skills well in mathematics lessons, they have few opportunities to practise or develop these skills across the curriculum. However, when given the opportunity, such as when they complete graph work in subjects other than mathematics, the graphs are often poorly drawn or do not always have a suitable scale or labels, and pupils rarely use them to draw conclusions.

Pupils benefit from interesting opportunities to develop their digital skills. For example, they use a modelling program to investigate the periodic table and the properties of elements and an online platform to create different types of maps of the local area. They also collect data about where products in their home come from and use a spreadsheet to analyse and represent this information in graph form.

Pupils develop their creative skills well in subjects such as music where they compose music to create different effects. They also develop their creativity in English, particularly in Key Stage 3, when they write poems and descriptions based on Roald Dahl's 'Boy'. When given the opportunity to develop their thinking skills, pupils do so effectively such as when they explore examples and non-examples of fractions in mathematics lessons.

In general, pupils do not make sufficient progress in their Welsh language skills. This is largely due to the lack of provision, particularly in Key Stage 4. A minority of pupils have a limited grasp of basic vocabulary and are able to compose simple phrases, though only a few are able to connect basic sentences to create paragraphs. Although they read very basic texts in Welsh and locate simple information, many pupils, particularly at Key Stage 4, lack the confidence to speak Welsh other than individual words.

Most of the pupils in the Secondary Education Nurture Centre (SENC) are making suitable progress towards their individual targets from their starting points on entry. They are developing useful skills to support them in their learning and life outside of school.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Relationships between pupils and staff are a strong feature of the school, and pupils value the kind and caring approach taken by the staff. Many feel respected and well supported. They feel safe in school and know who to go to for support. Most pupils say that they are not affected by bullying and are confident that any pastoral issues are followed up effectively.

Most pupils are welcoming and friendly towards visitors, and many behave well in lessons and around the school. The majority of pupils consistently engage positively with their learning and sustain concentration appropriately. Many work effectively in groups and pairs, and a majority work well independently. The majority are confident in articulating their views and opinions and are keen to share examples of their work.

However, a minority of pupils complete insufficient work in their lessons, with many unfinished or poorly completed tasks and gaps in their books. This is particularly in lessons where teachers' expectations are too low. A few pupils do not listen carefully enough and are unable to sustain concentration.

Pupils of all ages benefit from a range of valuable opportunities to develop their leadership skills by being part of the school Senedd, which involves a variety of groups such as those for teaching and learning, well-being and the community. Pupils in the Senedd speak confidently and passionately about their ability to affect real change and voice their opinion. Many pupils feel encouraged to attend activities outside of lessons such as cooking, karate, hairdressing, coding, playing bongos and cricket.

Attendance is notably low, which is having a negative impact on pupils' progress. The attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals and those with additional learning needs is of particular concern. Many pupils say that they would like to review current lunchtime arrangements as they feel that long queue times mean they do not have enough time to eat their lunch and enjoy their other interests.

Pupils in the SENc are happy to be in the centre and most of them feel safe there and attend well. They are developing positive attitudes to learning while in the centre and building their resilience. These pupils develop their self-esteem and their ability to recognise and regulate their emotions well.

Teaching and learning experiences

Teaching at Cefn Saeson is characterised by positive relationships between staff and pupils. Teachers know their pupils well, and offer them support and encouragement at every opportunity. In the majority of cases, teaching is effective in helping pupils to make sound progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills. In a minority of instances, shortcomings in teaching limit the progress that pupils make.

Where teaching is effective, teachers thoughtfully plan sequences of suitably demanding activities that build well on each other. They carefully prepare a variety of resources that engage pupils well. These teachers provide clear explanations and model learning effectively. They use a range of beneficial strategies to monitor pupils' progress and give pupils useful verbal feedback to help them improve. In a few instances, teachers use skilful questioning to explore pupils' understanding and develop their thinking.

Where teaching is not effective enough, it is often because teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils can do. As a result, they plan activities that are insufficiently demanding and do not help pupils to develop relevant skills and their understanding of the subject. This reduces pupil engagement and does not help them to be independent in their learning. Questioning is not used well enough to support pupils' learning. In a few instances, teachers are too accepting of off-task behaviour and low levels of effort.

Although a minority of teachers provide pupils with written feedback that identifies clearly what pupils have done well and how they could improve, too often comments overgenerously praise work that is incorrect or at best mediocre. Overall, feedback

does not provide pupils with sufficient guidance to help them develop their literacy skills. Pupil self-assessment activities are not always used judiciously, and are often unhelpful and time-consuming.

Leaders have developed a vision for the Curriculum for Wales that is based on their core belief that 'each and every child matters'. The school has developed an ambitious and bold strategy to co-construct with their pupils a curriculum that develops the knowledge, skills and attributes that will support their lifelong learning. However, the school's ambition for the curriculum has not been sufficiently underpinned by a consistent enough focus on improving the effectiveness of teaching.

Supported by partnership work with local primary schools, the school adapts its Year 7 curriculum to respond to the needs of more vulnerable pupils beneficially through a nurture group. It provides a suitable choice of subject options at Key Stage 4, including a range of vocational qualifications. However, a few more able pupils do not have suitable provision in English from January onwards in Year 11. In addition, provision to develop pupils' Welsh language skills and their understanding of Welsh culture and heritage is underdeveloped.

Across the curriculum, the school provides beneficial provision to develop pupils' oracy skills. In general, pupils have suitable opportunities to practise their reading and writing skills. However, they do not have enough opportunities to develop the full range of writing skills across the curriculum. Although pupils develop their numeracy skills well in their mathematics lessons, provision to develop their numeracy in other relevant subjects is at an early stage of development. This is also true of provision to develop pupils' digital skills. The school provides beneficial interventions for pupils with weaker literacy and numeracy skills.

The school has suitable curriculum arrangements to support pupils' personal and social education in Key Stage 3, for example by teaching them the importance of staying safe online. Pupils of all ages have suitable opportunities to learn about the experiences of black, Asian and minority ethnic and LGBTQ+ communities. However, at Key Stage 4, pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to learn about important health and well-being issues.

The school offers a wide range of lunchtime and after school activities, including numerous sport clubs, an Italian club and the school orchestra. In particular, pupils' social and cultural development is supported well by free access to musical instruments and tuition for all. The school supports the curriculum enrichment of pupils eligible for free school meals by providing free transport to sports clubs and trips.

Staff in the SENCO adapt the curriculum sensitively to meet the significant social, emotional and mental health needs of their pupils. They plan engaging and purposeful learning activities that are matched well to pupils' needs. Staff work flexibly to maximise the engagement of pupils. In general, teachers have high expectations and skilfully challenge learners through their questioning. Off-site activities such as carpentry, horse-riding, mountain biking and swimming enrich the pupils' learning experiences.

Care, support and guidance

Cefn Saeson Comprehensive School provides an inclusive learning environment that supports pupils' emotional, health and social needs well. Leaders promote successfully a caring ethos, which is at the heart of all the school's work. Staff know their pupils well and build supportive relationships with families. They work effectively with a range of external agencies such as Platform and Barnardo's to support pupils' health and well-being.

Leaders have a sound overview of the provision for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN). They are well prepared for ALN reform and are responding positively to changes in practice, such as the use of one-page profiles and individual development plans (IDP). The school has a range of suitable provision to meet the specific needs of pupils with ALN and enable them to develop their social skills. Teaching assistants support ALN pupils effectively within mainstream lessons and in intervention sessions. The newly established class for vulnerable pupils in Year 7 has an engaging curriculum and as a result, these pupils enjoy their learning and make positive progress.

Vulnerable pupils are supported by a range of suitable provision, for example outdoor learning. The school has recently established a 'Pupil Inclusion Centre' (PIC) to support pupils at risk of permanent exclusion or disengagement. This provision is well-resourced and utilises external support appropriately, such as the Youth Service. Despite these strengths, the PIC does not enable all pupils to access a suitably broad or challenging curriculum offer. In addition, the school does not track the progress of these pupils closely or evaluate the impact of their work well enough.

The safeguarding team carry out their work competently and with compassion. There is a collective understanding across all staff of the importance of safeguarding. Child protection procedures are sound, and the school investigates any alleged incidents of bullying, keeping suitable records. Staff receive regular safeguarding training and have a clear understanding of the part they play in keeping pupils safe. They are offered valuable monthly professional supervision sessions to help them to deal with particularly challenging cases. The school responds promptly and thoroughly to safeguarding concerns brought to their attention. Key staff are on hand to discuss any concerns a pupil may have and are clearly identifiable by wearing a purple lanyard. Members of the governing body receive regular training and updates in relation to safeguarding.

The school's inclusive culture promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development appropriately in general. Daily form time provides an opportunity for pupils to reflect on key and current issues and consider their role within the wider community and the world.

Leaders encourage pupils to be active participants in the life of the school and pupil voice is a key feature. Committees within the Senedd allow pupils to raise important issues with the school and bring about changes that matter to them. As a result, pupils have developed beneficial projects within the school, for example, the development of a community clothes bank.

The school provides beneficial advice to pupils, including information about careers and preparing for post-16 education. In Year 11 pupils benefit from appointments with the careers adviser, undertake visits to local colleges and receive helpful 'taster sessions' to trial different subjects.

There has been limited provision for PSE in Year 10 so far this year. As a consequence, pupils have not had sufficient opportunity to learn about important aspects of health and well-being.

Leaders have identified the need to improve persistent absence and behaviour as a priority in the school development plan. The pastoral team focus clearly on supporting the most vulnerable pupils, and are highly aware of their social, emotional and educational needs. The school has put in place a range of relevant interventions for these pupils to enable them to improve their attendance. However, leaders do not evaluate well enough the impact of these strategies. In addition, despite recognising attendance as a priority for the most vulnerable pupils, the school does not use available data well enough to monitor the attendance of all pupils, or of specific groups of pupils, such as those eligible for free school meals. Leaders do not plan well enough to improve attendance or set sufficiently ambitious targets, and as a result attendance figures are too low. Overall, the school does not evaluate its work to improve attendance, or other aspects of care, support and guidance, well enough.

Staff in the SEN care deeply about their pupils and work effectively to build strong relationships with them. All pupils in the centre have individual plans and staff monitor and review their progress closely. Staff involve parents and carers as much as possible in developing pupils' provision and in supporting their well-being. They work effectively with a range of external agencies to support these pupils.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides passionate leadership and is supported fully by his senior team. Together, they have communicated suitably their vision of aiming 'to ensure all make meaningful progress in learning, to thrive and flourish'. The headteacher models leadership values clearly, has high expectations of all staff, and deploys them appropriately in order to make best use of their skills. Senior leaders' responsibilities are distributed equitably and are suitably understood, and they have a strong ethos of teamwork. They have empowered staff to take risks and experiment with new approaches to the curriculum, although these developments have not been evaluated thoroughly enough to assess their impact on pupils' learning.

Leaders foster a sound culture of safeguarding, where staff are proud of their school and promote the safety and well-being of pupils throughout many aspects of their work. However, leaders have not secured sufficient improvements in some important aspects of the school's work, including the quality of teaching, attendance and provision for skills, particularly Welsh.

The school is developing a cycle of self-evaluation and improvement planning activities which is helping leaders to recognise some broad areas for improvement such as pupils' extended writing and numeracy skills. However, quality assurance activities do not always focus precisely enough on identifying the specific strengths and areas for improvement in important aspects of its work or evaluate them with

sufficient rigour. For example, leaders do not evaluate well enough the impact of teaching on pupils' progress in their knowledge, understanding and skills, the cross-curricular provision for skills, or the effectiveness of strategies to address poor attendance. This reduces leaders' ability to monitor accurately the impact that their actions are having on pupil progress, plan for improvement, or target professional learning to best effect.

The school provides staff with a suitable range of professional learning opportunities, including a strong focus on developing Curriculum for Wales and appropriate opportunities to share practice within their departments. However, the evaluation of the impact of professional learning is not robust enough. There are suitable arrangements for managing the performance of staff and performance management objectives link appropriately to the school priorities. However, improvement processes, such as performance management and professional learning, are not integrated closely enough and professional learning does not have a sufficiently strong focus on developing leadership.

Although middle leaders value the supportive nature of line management arrangements, there is too much variation in how robustly senior leaders challenge them and help them to understand all facets of their role. Processes do not focus consistently enough on the core aspects of their work, such as attendance or the impact of teaching on pupils' progress, learning and skills development. This limits senior leaders' ability to hold middle leaders to account. Although middle leaders are generally able to describe broad strengths in their areas of responsibility, they are not sufficiently involved in self-evaluation and improvement planning. Therefore, they do not have a precise understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in their areas of responsibility. This limits their ability to drive improvements in important aspects of their work.

The SENCO is led capably and supported by a motivated and skilled team of teachers and support staff. Staff are engaged in useful professional learning that supports their work. Safeguarding arrangements in the SENCO are strong.

The headteacher, business manager and governing body manage and monitor the budget carefully. Grant funding is spent appropriately to try to reduce the impact of poverty, although this has not had sufficient impact on, for example the attendance of pupils eligible for free school meals.

Governors are enthusiastic and committed in their support of the school. They play a suitable role in monitoring finance, understand their role in safeguarding and the promotion of healthy eating and drinking, and understand the school's work in mitigating against the effects of poverty. They offer helpful challenge to the school regarding some aspects of its work.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent 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 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 a broad sample of lessons, 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 (<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/>)

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

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publications Section

Estyn

Anchor Court, Keen Road

Cardiff

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

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website:

<http://www.estyn.gov.wales/>