



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

A report on

Ysgol Maes Y Mynydd

**Pentredwr
Rhosllanerchrugog
Wrexham
LL14 1DD**

Date of inspection: November 2023

by

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

About Ysgol Maes Y Mynydd

Name of provider	Ysgol Maes Y Mynydd
Local authority	Wrexham County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Primary
Religious character	*
Number of pupils on roll	296
Pupils of statutory school age	213
Number in nursery classes	49
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 Primary is 23.0%)	37.7%
Percentage of pupils identified as having additional learning needs (a) (The national percentage of pupils identified as having an additional learning need in Primary is 16.1%)	2.3%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.0%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	9.4%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/01/2023
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	01/06/2015
Start date of inspection	13/11/2023

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

The headteacher, leaders and staff form an effective team. They share a common purpose to continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the school and to support pupil well-being. Staff understand and meet the needs of pupils, families and the local community well. The school's arrangements to support pupils eligible for free school meals and those from low-income households are strong. The role of well-being manager is particularly effective in creating positive, supportive working relationships with families.

In nearly all cases, pupils have positive attitudes to their learning, take part enthusiastically in lessons and activities, and collaborate well with each other. Overall, they make good progress in the development of their social, literacy, numeracy and other skills. This is because teachers plan engaging and interesting lessons and activities. However, in a few cases, adults lead pupils' learning too much and this can limit the development of pupils' independent learning skills. The school has begun to develop plans to ensure more carefully that pupils build their skills progressively during lessons and as they move from one year group to the next, but these are still at an early stage of development. Pupils enjoy coming to school and usually arrive well motivated and enthusiastic about learning. Despite this, overall rates of attendance remain a concern.

Recommendations

- R1 Ensure that the curriculum develops pupils' skills systematically and progressively
- R2 Provide pupils with meaningful opportunities to learn independently, particularly from Year 4 to Year 6
- R3 Continue to improve attendance

What happens next

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

Main evaluation

Learning

Many pupils start school with literacy, numeracy and social skills below those expected for their age. Many pupils, including those eligible for free school meals, make suitable progress with these skills from their different starting points during their

time at the school. Most pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) make strong progress over time.

Most pupils develop their speaking and listening skills well. A majority of the youngest pupils eagerly chat with staff and visitors and describe confidently what they are doing. As they move through the school, most pupils become increasingly articulate. Older pupils listen purposefully to gain information. For example, when discussing the risks associated with smoking they listen carefully to the contributions of others and reflect thoughtfully on what they have heard before responding.

Over time, many pupils develop effective reading skills. Younger pupils acquire an understanding of the relationship between letters and sounds quickly. They enjoy looking at a wide range of books and develop positive attitudes to reading. By Year 3, many pupils' reading skills are secure. For instance, they use a variety of strategies successfully to read unfamiliar words, such as re-reading sentences and using clues from pictures in a story book to check meaning. Older pupils use their phonic knowledge well to read unfamiliar words and recall technical topic-based vocabulary efficiently. For example, pupils in Year 5 use the word 'obsidian' when referring to what happens when molten lava reaches the sea.

Many pupils develop appropriate writing skills. The youngest pupils enjoy mark making with pens and chalks and demonstrate appropriate control. They embrace the regular and effective opportunities to develop their independent writing skills. By Year 2, many pupils write a sequence of simple sentences and use basic punctuation, spelling and grammar accurately. Many older pupils write suitably in a range of genres, such as descriptions of a character and instructions on how to look after your teeth. However, even though many pupils enjoy the writing process, too often they do not evaluate, edit and present their work well enough.

As a result of the regular use of Welsh by staff throughout the school, many pupils develop appropriate Welsh oracy skills. Most of the youngest pupils develop a suitable Welsh vocabulary and respond to commands and greetings appropriately. By Year 3, many pupils use basic phrases confidently, for example to express their feelings or describe where they live. By Year 6, many pupils recall relevant sentence structures and vocabulary suitably, for example when discussing their hobbies.

Most pupils develop effective mathematical skills. The youngest pupils use mathematical vocabulary well as part of their activities. For example, in the forest area, nursery pupils compare the sizes of different leaves using language such as 'smaller' and 'bigger'. By Year 2, many pupils develop a good understanding of the number system and recall accurately number bonds to ten. A few use this knowledge well to create larger bonds to 100. Most pupils in Years 4 to 6 work well with the four rules of number and develop sound data handling skills. However, as a result of a lack of opportunity, many pupils do not apply their numeracy skills frequently enough across the curriculum.

Pupils enjoy practising and using their digital skills as part of their learning. By Year 2, most pupils take digital photos and upload them to an app independently and successfully. Many older pupils use technology effectively to create and edit their written work, including formatting text and adding images independently. However,

overall, pupils' digital skills are underdeveloped and they have a limited understanding of certain key skills, such as how to use databases and spreadsheets.

Most pupils' physical skills develop well through a range of experiences and activities. For example, the youngest pupils develop their fine motor skills successfully as they use tweezers to place conkers accurately in an ice cube tray and pupils in Year 2 chop fruit carefully to make a fruit salad. Most pupils develop their creative skills well. The youngest pupils enjoy making animal shapes out of dough, whilst older pupils make impressive sculptures with fruit and vegetables in the style of the artist, Arcimboldo.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

There is a friendly and nurturing ethos at the school that helps pupils to feel cared for and valued. They know which adults to turn to if they need help or have any worries. Older pupils speak confidently about how to keep themselves safe when working online. Nearly all pupils are courteous and well behaved both in lessons and during playtime. Most pupils understand the behaviour policy of the school and articulate what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. They recognise the importance of healthy eating and talk confidently about how to make sensible choices about what they eat and drink. They enjoy coming to school and feel safe when they are there. However, rates of attendance remain too low.

During their learning and at break times, most pupils share equipment, take turns, and listen to each other very well. They sustain their focus without disruption, often engage in their learning confidently, and have suitable techniques to help them persevere when they are challenged. For example, they use the 'self, neighbour, other, teacher' strategy when they are not sure how to approach a task. When provided with the opportunity, pupils respond well to feedback and often make valuable improvements to their work. They value the 'even better if' time, which allows them to refine their work based on their teacher's feedback.

Pupils in the school leadership groups are developing their roles well and having an impact on whole school initiatives. For example, the school council arranged for more games to be provided to enhance breakfast club provision and the eco-committee established an eco-code to support pupils to be more aware of sustainability.

Most pupils understand the importance of behaving positively towards others, such as by demonstrating friendship and showing respect and care. For instance, pupils often actively try to ensure that every child has a friend and someone to play with on the yard. Many pupils develop as ethical learners. For example, older pupils talk passionately about the impact of tourism on Yr Wyddfa and collaborate well to suggest how they might safeguard it.

Teaching and learning experiences

In most cases, teachers plan and deliver lessons and activities to ensure that pupils make good progress in a range of skills, understanding and knowledge. Staff use questioning well to gauge pupils' understanding, prompt their thinking and support them to make the next steps in their learning. In the best cases, they link this

effectively with assessment for learning techniques, such as providing pupils with useful opportunities to discuss an answer with a partner before providing a response.

In most cases, teachers deliver lessons with appropriate pace, and this helps to ensure that pupils remain interested and engaged in their learning. There are strong working relationships between pupils, and between pupils and staff, across the school. This results in pupils that are willing to approach adults when they need help socially and emotionally, or with aspects of their work. The school's deployment of adults to support pupils' learning is a strength in many areas. In the most effective cases, staff use their expertise well to know when to intervene and how best to prompt pupils to support their learning. However, in a few cases, particularly in the classes from Year 4 to Year 6, learning is too heavily directed by adults, and this limits pupils' opportunities to develop their ability as independent learners. Teaching and learning from nursery to Year 3 generally align well with the ethos and practice of effective foundation learning. Teachers provide pupils with meaningful opportunities to choose which activities they engage with, and to learn through play in a range of indoor and outdoor environments. However, at times, adults overly support pupils' learning, which limits pupils' opportunities to develop as truly independent learners.

In most cases, teachers provide pupils with useful verbal feedback during lessons that helps them understand what they are doing well and how they could improve. Written feedback is positive and often results in pupils making useful improvements to their work, although this is not consistent across the school. In the best cases teachers provide pupils with beneficial dedicated time to respond to feedback and make improvements. Staff use assessment data suitably to plan lessons, for example to record the progress pupils make and plan next steps in the development of their literacy skills.

Teachers generally plan and provide pupils with tasks that are at an appropriate level for their stage of development. In a few classes pupils choose the level of difficulty of their tasks. Pupils respond well to this, and many become adept at choosing the most suitable level of challenge for their ability. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to work independently with a level of challenge that is suited to addressing the next steps in their learning. Teachers make good use of the school's extensive outdoor areas to support pupils' learning. For example, regular forest sessions in the foundation learning classes allow pupils to learn and explore in the outdoor environment.

The school plans its curriculum logically over a two-year cycle, organised into 12 family values. For example, in the autumn term there is a focus on 'friendship and appreciation' to aid the development of peer relationships, help pupils to recognise the feelings of others and to support them as they start their new classes. Teachers and leaders are beginning to develop a range of interesting and engaging approaches to delivering teaching and learning across the curriculum. For example, younger pupils enjoy visits to local woodland to explore the theme of habitats, and older pupils visit a science museum to learn about biodiversity. Staff are beginning to consider how to integrate the 'four purposes' of the Curriculum for Wales into their teaching and how to ensure that learning is relevant to pupils. However, overall curriculum design is still at an early stage of development.

Staff develop pupils' Welsh language skills suitability. For example, the daily 'Helper Heddiw' sessions support pupils to develop their oracy skills at an appropriate level. Pupils and staff promote and encourage the use of Welsh throughout the day. For example, pupils request their equipment of choice using Welsh phrases at a central activity store supervised by staff and pupil ambassadors. The school provides well for the development of pupils' personal and social skills. Staff monitor pupils' well-being and plan activities thoughtfully to address any issues that arise. The school has recently introduced a system to ensure the gradual development of pupils' mathematical and numeracy skills over time. However, it is too early to measure the impact of this work on the progress that pupils make. Leaders recognise that the school's overall approach to the systematic and progressive development of pupils' skills knowledge and understanding is underdeveloped.

Care, support and guidance

Pupil well-being is an important priority for leaders and other staff at the school. They work tirelessly to create an inclusive and nurturing environment for pupils. Nearly all staff have high expectations of behaviour and use a range of strategies to communicate these to pupils. As a result, in most classes, there is a calm and purposeful working environment.

The school ensures that pupils from all backgrounds play an active role in pupil voice groups and in teams that represent the school at sporting fixtures. The school works effectively to ensure that all pupils, including those eligible for free school meals and those from low income households, take part in educational visits.

The school provides appropriate opportunities for pupils to develop their awareness of diversity and inclusion. An example of this is pupils' work based on the book, 'The Only Way is Badger Way', which focuses on the need to cater for the requirements of every species to have a fair and equitable society. In other areas of the curriculum, pupils celebrate different languages and cultures and explore the importance of celebrating 'abilities within disabilities'. Older pupils explore children's rights and develop empathy through group discussions and the use of texts such as 'A Bad Day for Jayden', and 'Goodnight Mr. Tom'. However, there are few opportunities for pupils to develop their spiritual awareness or explore world religions.

There are well-planned opportunities for pupils from Year 2 and older to take part in expressive arts workshops that lead to pupils participating in events that showcase their skills. Older pupils benefit from a range of extra-curricular clubs that allow them to compete against other schools and sing as part of a choir in the local community and at the Llangollen Music Festival.

The school has very clear processes for identifying and supporting pupils with additional needs. The additional learning needs co-ordinator and well-being manager, along with a well-trained team of support staff, carry out a wide range of engaging and effective intervention sessions. This helps to ensure that targeted pupils make necessary progress with important aspects of their learning, such as reading, writing and numeracy. Younger pupils benefit greatly from highly engaging and stimulating sensory sessions. Teachers and teaching assistants deliver these in a consistent manner that encourages pupil participation and celebrates success.

The work of staff in the school's nurture class to meet the social and emotional needs of identified pupils is a strength of the school. They provide a calm and well-structured environment where pupils feel safe, valued and ready to learn. Pupils benefit from real life experiences that staff build on back in the classroom. For example, pupils visit local shops to purchase groceries and enjoy developing their maths skills as they use the ingredients to bake a cake.

The school has a comprehensive approach to improving attendance rates. Specific actions, such as a buddy system implemented by the school council, have resulted in improved rates of attendance for most of the pupils that the school has targeted over the last 12 months. However, these strategies have yet to have a significant impact on overall rates of attendance, which have not returned to pre-COVID levels and remain a cause for concern.

There is a strong ethos of safeguarding across the school. Staff have a good awareness of their responsibility to keep pupils safe and know the actions they need to take should they have any concerns. The school is a safe and secure learning environment.

Leadership and management

Since his appointment, the headteacher has worked effectively with staff to assess the school's strengths and identify areas for improvement. Leaders and staff have created a clear shared vision for the school based around improving the quality of teaching, raising standards and ensuring the well-being of all pupils. They know the pupils and the local community well and ensure that the school's provision is adapted effectively to meet their needs. Leaders demonstrate high expectations of themselves, staff and pupils.

The school plays close regard to the impact of poverty on educational attainment. There are many examples of the school working effectively to offset the cost of the school day and to support families through the financial crisis. For instance, the school uses the funds from non-uniform days to pay for fuel pre-payment vouchers that the public can collect from the local community café. Leaders use grant funding effectively to support pupils from targeted families. For example, the school employs a well-being manager to provide specific support to pupils and their families. Her work has been fundamental in ensuring positive relations with parents and is beginning to have an impact on improving rates of attendance.

The school is making appropriate progress in line with the national priorities of developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. Leaders recognise a need to make further improvements in these areas and have implemented plans that are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' skills, for example with raising the standard of pupils' writing. Leaders ensure an effective culture of safeguarding in the school. Staff know how to respond to any concerns they may have about pupils and the learning environment is safe and secure. Overall, leaders ensure that pupils make appropriate progress in the development of their skills, knowledge and understanding during lessons and activities and over time. However, an over-direction of learning in a few cases leads to pupils making less progress than they could with wider skills of independence, collaboration and problem solving. The school is at the early stages of implementing the Curriculum for Wales.

Leaders model and promote professional values and behaviours that contribute positively to school improvement and encourage effective collaboration between staff. The headteacher and senior leaders place an important priority on the individual well-being of staff. For example, they respond sensitively and with empathy to any personal and family issues that staff face and provide staff with time each half term to focus on their well-being.

Leaders deploy financial, human and physical resources well. The learning environments, both indoors and outdoors, are well equipped attractive and engaging spaces that support teaching and learning well. Leaders ensure that the school is well staffed and resourced. There are ample teachers and support staff to meet the needs of pupils, including those who need additional and targeted support.

The school recognises the importance of developing productive relationships with parents to ensure regular attendance by pupils and to support pupils' well-being. The school has developed several initiatives to help parents to support their children at home. For example, by helping parents to improve their literacy skills, delivering courses around paediatric first aid and cookery programmes to support parents' understanding of what constitutes healthy eating and meal planning.

Governors fulfil their statutory obligations and take full account of relevant legislation and guidance. A framework of individual responsibilities and sub-committees supports the work of governors suitably. However, their involvement in the first hand gathering of evidence has been hampered by COVID and the school is at an early stage of reintroducing a structured approach towards this.

Leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in the school. They recognise the need to further involve the wider school community in the gathering of evidence around the quality of teaching and learning and in developing and implementing plans for improvement. For example, leaders gathered the views of staff around the strengths and areas for improvement in the school but recognise that they do not involve them sufficiently in the gathering of first-hand evidence through activities such as learning walks and by looking at pupils' work.

Leaders have begun to establish a system of curriculum leads and working parties to involve more staff in the school improvement process. They are taking a measured and strategic approach towards this by introducing and embedding work in literacy, numeracy and Welsh before implementing in other areas. These initiatives show early signs of impact. For example, leaders now have clear plans for the development of these areas and a plan for the progression of skills in numeracy is in place. However, overall, it is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of the new approach.

Leaders have created a positive culture of professional learning that supports the development of the professional practice of staff across the school. Leaders ensure that staff access courses and attend internal training sessions that help address the personal development needs of staff. Recently, the school has begun to link professional learning more closely with the school's improvement priorities. For example, teachers in the early years' classes have shared their learning around the effective use of adults to enable learning, leading to improvements in the way staff support pupils from Year 1 to Year 3.

Evidence base of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the parent/carer and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teachers and the governing body through their questionnaire responses

During an inspection, inspectors normally:

- hold a meeting with parents/carers to hear their views on the school and its effectiveness
- meet the headteacher, governors, senior and middle leaders (where appropriate) and individual teachers to evaluate the impact of the school's work
- meet pupils to discuss their work, to listen to them read and to gain their views about various aspects of their school
- meet groups of pupils in leadership roles, such as representatives from the school council and eco-committee
- visit a broad sample of classes, including learning support groups and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings, including classrooms, support groups and in outdoor areas
- where appropriate, visit the specialist resource base within the school to see pupils' learning
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs, where appropriate
- attend assemblies and daily acts of collective worship
- look closely at the school's self-evaluation processes
- consider the school's improvement plan and look at evidence to show how well the school has taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of school documents, including information on pupil assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body, information on pupils' well-being, including the safeguarding of pupils, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Copies of the report

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

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

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

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