



Report summary for parents and carers on Pen-Y-Dre High School

Date of inspection: January 2024

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

Overview

Pen y Dre High School is an inclusive, caring and supportive environment that sits at the heart of its community. In this nurturing environment leaders and staff create a safe space where all are valued and encouraged to 'aspire, achieve, believe' despite the challenges they may face. Leaders are relentless in their vision to remove any barriers to learning, including those related to the impact of poverty and ensuring that all pupils have the best life chances. Pupils benefit from the outstanding opportunities to develop their Welsh language skills and to become immersed in the local and national culture and heritage of Wales. The wealth of opportunities provided ensure that pupils at the school develop an empathy and lifelong appreciation of Wales.

The headteacher provides thoughtful and sensitive leadership. He creates a strong sense of belonging amongst staff and pupils, and a learning environment that encourages and supports pupils to make progress from their starting points in the school. The unique working relationships between staff and pupils creates a culture where pupils are confident to take risks. Staff support for pupils with a diverse range of needs is a notable strength. During the inspection, pupils' attitudes to learning and their interactions with adults and their peers were an outstanding feature.

The school provides an ambitious tailored curriculum that allows pupils the freedom to thrive in their areas of interest. However, currently, the school's provision for the progressive development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum is underdeveloped. In many lessons, teachers' high expectations and careful planning engage pupils' interest and curiosity and encourage them to achieve their best. As a result, in these lessons pupils make secure progress in their knowledge, understanding and skills. In a minority of instances, teachers do not develop pupils' understanding, knowledge and skills well enough, and this limits the progress they make.

Leaders have developed a wide range of opportunities for professional learning, and this is having a positive impact on many aspects of the school's work including understanding the diverse needs of pupils and developing leadership at all levels. There is a genuine ambition through secure self-evaluation activities to improve all aspects of the school's work, though in a few instances processes need to be sharper. Despite considerable effort by leaders, whole-school attendance remains too low, in particular persistent absenteeism and is a concern.

Despite the notable challenges faced during the refurbishment, staff have worked diligently to ensure pupils continue to learn and thrive.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve pupils' attendance – especially of those persistently absent from school
- R2 Address the shortcomings in teaching identified in this report
- R3 Improve pupils' literacy and numeracy skills by strengthening the planning for the progressive development of these skills across the curriculum
- R4 Strengthen self-evaluation and improvement planning processes

What happens next

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

Estyn will invite the school to prepare a case study on its work in relation to 'Creating a strong culture and appreciation of Welsh language and heritage'.



School context

Name of provider	Pen-Y-Dre High School
Local authority	Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
Language of the provider	English
Type of school	Secondary
Number of pupils on roll	942
Pupils of statutory school age	942
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 21.2%)	32.2%
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 14.8%)	23.4%
Percentage of pupils who speak Welsh at home	0.6%
Percentage of pupils with English as an additional language	5.8%
Date of headteacher appointment	01/09/2012
Date of previous Estyn inspection (if applicable)	02/11/2015
Start date of inspection	22/01/2024
The school is currently undergoing a £55 million refurbishment programme funded by the Welsh Government and is part of the Sustainable Communities for Learning Programme. The refurbishment began in Summer 2022 and is due for completing in Autumn 2025. Currently the refurbishment is focused on a third of the existing site. When completed the school will be Wales' first carbon net zero secondary school.	

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