



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

A report on

**Ysgol Gymraeg Penalltau
Heol Cwm Calon
Penallta
Ystrad Mynach
CF82 6AP**

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by

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

About Ysgol Gymraeg Penalltau

Ysgol Penalltau is a Welsh-medium primary school situated in the middle of the Cwm Calon estate, near Ystrad Mynach in the county of Caerphilly. There are 217 pupils between three and eleven years old on roll, including 30 part-time nursery age pupils. They are divided into eight classes, including two mixed-age classes.

Approximately 16% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. This is lower than the national percentage of 19%. A few of the pupils speak Welsh at home and very few are from ethnic minority backgrounds. The school has identified 17% of its pupils as having additional learning needs. Again, this is lower than the national percentage of 21%. Very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs.

The headteacher was appointed to the post in September 2009 and the school was last inspected in February 2011. This is the first inspection since the school reached its full growth.

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

Summary

The pupils' voice and wellbeing are very strong features of the work of Ysgol Gymraeg Penalltau. Nearly all pupils behave very well and show genuine courtesy and respect towards each other and towards adults. Most pupils are making progress in their learning which is at least good from their starting points. They have pride in the Welsh language and they speak confidently and with accuracy. Most pupils apply their literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills effectively across the curriculum. Staff deliver a stimulating and motivating curriculum that engages nearly all pupils' interest successfully. They ensure a safe learning environment in which pupils feel confident about making mistakes and learning from them. Leaders have high expectations for the school and a clear focus on ensuring that pupils make the best possible progress and achieve high standards.

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

Recommendations

- R1 Share best practice in teaching across the school
- R2 Plan purposefully to develop pupils' skills in the outdoor environment
- R3 Refine the school development plan to focus on the main priorities, and ensure that they are sufficiently sharp to enable leaders to measure the effect of implementation

What happens next

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

Main findings

Standards: Good

On entry to the school, a majority of pupils have low skills considering their age. During their time there, most make progress in their learning that is at least good from their starting points. Pupils with additional learning needs make good progress towards reaching their personal targets. Most develop high-quality thinking skills, for example when discussing a subject such as school uniform, and consider and identify with different opinions intelligently.

Although many pupils join the school without the ability to speak Welsh, they acquire the language at a very early stage. As they move through the foundation phase, most use the language confidently when discussing and explaining their work and when working with their peers. Across key stage 2, most develop sound oracy skills in both languages. They use vocabulary effectively that is relevant to the subject, for example numeracy and scientific vocabulary. The standard and accuracy of the Welsh language are an obvious strength in the school with most pupils thinking carefully about the Welsh word when speaking rather than turning to English.

Most pupils develop phonological awareness effectively and use the information successfully to build unfamiliar words. They use early reading skills soundly when following and discussing a story in the reception class. By Year 2, many read fluently and with clear expression. They use a dictionary and a thesaurus effectively to search for word definitions and synonyms. Most pupils' reading skills develop competently in both languages across key stage 2. They use their skills effectively across the curriculum, for example when researching for information on African animals.

In the foundation phase, most pupils write effectively for different purposes in Welsh, for example creating a diary from the perspective of a character living in a castle. They organise their work sensibly and vary sentences to make the work interesting for the reader. Most pupils in key stage 2 build increasingly on their writing skills in both languages. They have a sound awareness of the features of a wide range of writing forms. When writing, they choose interesting vocabulary and show a good awareness of the audience, for example when writing a letter of persuasion arguing in favour of organ donation after death.

Most pupils make sound progress in their number skills, building successfully on their previous learning. They measure objects using standard units in the foundation phase. In key stage 2, they measure shapes intelligently to calculate their area. Across the school, most apply their skills soundly across the curriculum. Effective examples of this are the ways in which they decide on the amount of ingredients needed to make tasty soup in the foundation phase and comparing athletes' height with their running time to see if there is a connection between them in key stage 2.

In the foundation phase, most pupils' ICT skills develop soundly. They use art packages confidently to create patterns. By Year 2, most can input simple data to a spreadsheet to create a graph with the information. Most save their work successfully, giving it an appropriate file name. Most pupils continue to make

gradual progress across key stage 2. They use word processing packages successfully to present their work. They create a simple formula to calculate the total amount of money received in their cafe, for example. Nearly all pupils have a sound awareness of how to stay safe when using the internet.

Across the school, most apply all their skills successfully when working on specific projects. For example, during enterprise projects, they use literacy to discuss and present ideas, thinking skills to determine the best product to create and number skills to calculate the cost of equipment and profit. This enables pupils to apply their skills effectively in real life situations.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Nearly all pupils speak confidently and with pride about their school. They appreciate the wide-ranging opportunities that are provided by staff for them to express opinions on the school's work through questionnaires, lesson observations and during activities such as 'Cuppa with the Headteacher'. In doing so, they contribute extensively to strategic decisions, such as changing the curricular emphasis and addressing the lack of opportunities for doing art, for example. Most pupils have a strong voice about their own learning through offering ideas at the beginning of each theme and following their own learning routes. After seeing news about hurricanes in America, for example, pupils are eager to learn more about what is happening and teachers adapt their planning effectively to include their ideas.

Members of the school council and the eco council are enthusiastic groups of pupils and their ideas also have a prominent place in the life of the school. They organise fundraising activities for a number of charities and this has a positive effect on their awareness of the needs of others. Many pupils contribute extensively in the community and play a prominent and important part in social events and competitions locally, such as carol singing at the local supermarket and the Menter Caerffili Christmas Fair.

Taking part in a good variety of children's committees such as the Food and Fitness Committee and the Dragons Committee contributes effectively to understanding nearly all personal and social aspects. This gives them the responsibility to lead important aspects of school life and to develop their skills purposefully, for example by organising a Fitness Week. Many pupils take part in a good variety of extra-curricular activities within and outside the school, for example the cooking, sports and folk dancing clubs. This contributes very positively to developing their understanding of the importance of fitness and healthy living. Nearly all pupils also have a sound understanding of the importance of drinking water and healthy eating.

Nearly all pupils enjoy the life and work of the school and feel safe within the caring, inclusive and supportive ethos that exists there. They are happy at school and eager to attend each day. The behaviour of nearly all pupils is particularly good in the classrooms and around the school. They are courteous and welcoming towards each other and towards staff and visitors. This contributes substantially to creating an effective learning environment. Most pupils are very caring towards each other and show respect for others during break times and lunch time.

In lessons, nearly all pupils are enthusiastic and work diligently for extended periods. They support each other's learning very well and develop to be confident and independent learners. Across the school, most pupils have a sound understanding of what they need to do to improve their work. They use visual support, such as their personal targets and the 'learning pit' display to develop and apply their skills effectively in different situations. Nearly all pupils are confident in their learning skills and engage in a range of activities without fear of failure.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

The quality of teaching across the school is good. There are outstanding elements in a minority of classes. Most teachers have high expectations of their pupils and they tailor work successfully for pupils of all abilities. They take advantage of regular opportunities to challenge pupils through skilful questioning and encourage them to think. One of the strengths of the teaching is the way that teachers and assistants create a safe learning environment for pupils. Through proficient use of the 'learning pit' and their gentle care for pupils, staff provide effective opportunities for them to develop skills to overcome challenges in their learning and to understand that it is fine to make mistakes. In general, staff are good language models and have a positive impact on the accuracy and high standards of pupils' language. In the very few classes where teaching is less effective, teachers do not always ensure a suitable pace for their lessons. This inhibits pupils' ability to make the best possible progress.

Teachers use assessment procedures successfully by giving pupils oral and written feedback. Written response to pupils' work is simple but very effective. It gives pupils clear guidance on what is good in their work and what needs to be improved. Teachers ensure valuable and sensible opportunities for pupils to improve their skills and the content of their work through redrafting specific aspects. As a result, most pupils discuss confidently how they improve their work and show the progress they have made as a result of feedback. Valuable opportunities are provided for pupils to assess each other's work and the work of their peers through procedures such as 'Marking Buddies'.

Teachers provide an interesting and stimulating curriculum that engages nearly all pupils successfully. A broad and contemporary theme-based curriculum and a wide range of active learning experiences develop pupils' skills and their desire to learn effectively. Valuable use is made of visitors and educational visits such as the visit to the Glamorgan Archive when studying the local area, to enrich the curriculum and to develop pupils' skills.

Teachers plan opportunities sensibly and methodically to develop pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills across the curriculum. They ensure that pupils receive regular opportunities to reinforce their skills in a wide range of subjects. In the best examples, teachers plan very effectively to ensure that pupils make decisions about their learning and develop a wide range of skills within particular projects. For example, Year 6 pupils plan a residential trip to Tresaith each year. They use their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills creatively when organising transport for the journey. They calculate food costs on a spreadsheet, for example, compare costs at different supermarkets, and write risk assessments for the visit.

Staff have a sound awareness of the principles of the foundation phase. In general, they plan a suitable balance between activities led by staff and opportunities for pupils to work independently in the learning areas. In the best practice, teachers enrich the learning areas skilfully and encourage pupils to think, for example when asking them to build a castle of a particular size in the construction area. However, teachers do not always plan purposefully enough to develop pupils' skills in the outdoor environment.

The school provides pupils with rich opportunities to learn about the language and culture of Wales. The effective development of the Language Charter ensures pupils' pride in their language and their country. This is supported successfully by planning valuable opportunities for pupils to learn about the history and culture of Wales, for example through the project work on Penalltau Colliery and studying work by local artists.

Care, support and guidance: Good

One of the school's strengths is the clear focus placed on the wellbeing of all pupils. Staff provide effective support for 'Hafan' pupils. This ensures that they receive purposeful emotional and social support so that they can benefit from all the school's learning experiences. The provision varies according to the unique needs of individual pupils and contributes very well to ensuring their best possible wellbeing. The school has appropriate arrangements to ensure that pupils understand the importance of healthy eating and drinking.

The school's robust tracking and monitoring procedures have a positive impact on pupils' standards. They enable staff to identify and support specific individuals and groups of pupils, including those who are vulnerable and those with additional learning needs. Teachers identify pupils' needs at an early stage and offer them purposeful intervention programmes where necessary. Assistants work enthusiastically under the guidance of the co-ordinator to implement the wide range of intervention programmes effectively. This enables pupils to make high-quality progress in their literacy and numeracy skills as they move through the school.

All pupils with additional learning needs have an individual education plan that includes specific and measurable targets. These plans are reviewed regularly jointly with pupils and parents. As a result, nearly all pupils make good progress against their personal targets.

The school provides a comprehensive personal and social education plan that fosters aspects such as respect, tolerance and equality effectively for the pupils. This enriches pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively. It organises visitors and rich educational visits that contribute successfully to pupils' understanding of their social responsibilities. For example, activities on healthy relationships and substance and drug misuse have a sound impact on pupils' ability to discuss, work together and respect each other's and others' perspectives about important social issues. The arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet requirements and are not a cause for concern.

The school provides pupils with rich opportunities to perform at school and in the local community, and fosters well their self-confidence and ability to work with their

peers. Effective examples of this include sports competitions, taking part in the Ffiliffest festival and carol singing at the local church. The school has succeeded well in a number of competitions in the local and wider area by submitting specific work on local history. This work strengthens further the partnership between home, school and community as the pupils develop their research and presentation skills. The school gives pupils an opportunity to develop their creative skills effectively by encouraging them to present information in a variety of ways, for example in replicating the artwork of local artists.

Provision for ensuring that pupils are proud of the Welsh language and of their Welsh culture and heritage is a strength in the school. The experiences they receive within the classroom and beyond enrich their understanding of their identity in addition to respecting diversity within Wales and in the rest of the world.

Leadership and management: Good

The headteacher has created a strong and clear vision since the school was established. That vision is based on ensuring that the wellbeing of pupils and staff is a central part of the school's work and that there is a strong focus on achieving high standards. The whole school community is committed to the ongoing emphasis on encouraging 'respect, readiness, belonging'. The deputy and the senior management team support the headteacher very skilfully. This means that staff, governors and pupils have high expectations for themselves and each other. All of the school's stakeholders work together effectively to create a caring, active and respectful ethos.

Procedures for evaluating the school's current standards are comprehensive, wide-ranging and thorough. The self-evaluation report highlights successfully what needs to be improved and is based firmly on the findings of an effective monitoring procedure. The pupil's voice is an integral part of self-evaluation procedures. Leaders respect pupils' opinions and take them seriously. Pupils contribute to the self-evaluation procedures by taking part in learning walks with the governors, by conducting pupil questionnaires and by observing lessons. All this feeds into the procedures for improvement, which result in maintaining and raising standards in the school.

The school development plan is an operational document that identifies the steps to be taken to raise standards. It sets out staff responsibilities and financial requirements clearly, together with measurable criteria. However, too many targets are identified which means that the school's main priorities are not completely clear to all stakeholders or sharp enough to be able to measure progress against them effectively enough.

The school has effective links with a wide range of partnerships that develop pupils' wellbeing and standards. Leaders ensure that the staff receive appropriate opportunities for professional development. They often commit to 'school to school' work in order to benefit from best practice. For example, the school has been part of a professional learning community working with another primary school on a project to improve teaching skills in mathematics. The school demonstrated best practice in mathematics to a cluster of different schools during a professional learning day. This has had a positive effect on pupils' numeracy skills in the school and their ability to apply the skills successfully across the curriculum.

There is particularly effective co-operation between the school and the local secondary school. Older pupils have a number of useful opportunities to visit the secondary school. This helps them to transition well to the next stage of their education. Teachers take advantage of beneficial opportunities to observe Year 7 lessons, while secondary teachers observe teaching in Year 6.

The governors have comprehensive knowledge and a sound understanding of the school's performance and procedures. They are very supportive and co-operate closely and effectively with leaders to ensure a clear strategic direction. Through constant visits, and regular meetings, they challenge the school successfully to improve and maintain standards.

The school has an appropriate level of staff and resources of high quality that meet the needs of the curriculum in full. Assistants are used effectively to meet the needs of various individuals and groups of pupils. Teachers use their planning, preparation and assessment time successfully. The headteacher arranges for teachers to be released in pairs in order to take advantage of the best opportunity for ensuring consistency in planning, assessing and standardising class work.

The school has a plan for using the pupil development grant, which identifies purposeful support for disadvantaged pupils. The school monitors the effectiveness of the provision successfully with regard to pupils' outcomes. As a result, pupils that are eligible for free school meals make sound progress from their starting points.

Copies of the report

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

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

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

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

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