



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

A report on

**The Hollies Special School
Bryn Heulog
Pentwyn
CF23 7XG**

Date of inspection: October 2019

by

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

About The Hollies Special School

The Hollies is a special day school, maintained by Cardiff City Council. Currently, it provides education for 102 pupils aged from 4 to 11 years. Nearly all pupils have statements of special educational needs. Most pupils who attend the school have a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). A very few pupils have additional difficulties relating to speech, language and communication.

Pupils are taught in classes that are broadly determined by their needs, ability and age, with considerable variation in individual starting points. For this reason, it is not appropriate to compare standards that pupils achieve at the school with national averages.

All pupils live in the Cardiff area. A minority are from various ethnic backgrounds with around 11 different home languages. Currently, there are no pupils with looked after status. A very few pupils speak Welsh as their first language at home. Around 35.5% of pupils receive free school meals. This is lower than the all Wales average of 42.3% for special schools.

The school, commissioned by the local authority, provides an outreach service to all schools in Cardiff. The 'Social Communication Interaction and Play' service (SCIP) provides support, advice, and guidance to mainstream schools on implementing appropriate strategies in working with pupils with autism in mainstream settings.

The school also provides early years support where there is some cross over in provision for pupils in their homes and on transition into the school. This is the 'Early Bird' project. The school also provide support through a project called 'APPEAL' for parents of pupils with English as an Additional Language.

The school is a curriculum pioneer school and is working with the Welsh Government and other schools to take forward developments relating to the curriculum. The headteacher has been in post since September 2017. The school was last inspected in May 2013.

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

During their time at The Hollies, nearly all pupils are happy to learn and many make strong progress. This is particularly evident in pupils' development of their communication and social skills.

Most pupils develop positive attitudes to learning and engage well in lessons. For a few pupils whose needs are more complex, their ability to attend to tasks is not as consistently well developed.

Working relationships between staff and pupils is of a very high standard. Combined with a high quality person centred approach to teaching, this has an extremely positive effect on pupils learning, behaviour, and wellbeing.

The headteacher and leadership team have a clear vision for the school, which permeates all aspects of the schools work. They have established a strong understanding of the strengths and areas for development and work effectively with staff to evaluate progress and plan for improvement.

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 Address the health and safety issue identified during the inspection
- R2 Ensure that all planned learning experiences meet the needs of pupils with more complex abilities
- R3 Develop a consistent approach to the delivery of information and communication technology (ICT) skills across the curriculum
- R4 Strengthen the performance management and professional learning arrangements for teaching assistants

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 two case studies. One on its work in relation to the schools development of a pupil profile assessment tool and secondly on their approach in managing curriculum innovation.

Main findings

Standards: Good

Many pupils make strong progress during their time at The Hollies School. They make particularly useful progress in developing relevant communication and social skills, which help them to become more independent in their daily lives. Most pupils develop these communication skills well using a variety of approaches, including physical actions, symbols and verbally. Many pupils use these approaches effectively and confidently. However, the use of signing as a communication approach is inconsistent across the school and restricts a very few pupils who may benefit from developing their communication skills effectively.

Many pupils develop particularly strong social skills through well-planned curriculum activities. Most pupils participate in small group activities, assemblies, and dine together at lunchtimes. These activities provide extremely beneficial opportunities for pupils to improve their skills such as working with others, sitting and sharing attention and developing their understanding of social events such as sharing a snack. The progress pupils make across areas such as these provide them with valuable skills, that they use at home and at school.

Many pupils develop their literacy skills effectively and apply these well across the curriculum. Across the school, many pupils develop particularly effective listening skills. They respond eagerly to staff, interact positively with visitors and in a few instances spontaneously with each other during small group activities and playtimes. Pupils develop their vocabulary appropriately in a 'choosing time' activity, for example when naming the train track and trains they want to play with.

Most pupils develop their reading skills appropriately in line with their ability. Pupils with very complex needs enjoy looking at books, they point to pictures and turn the pages. A minority of pupils read simple texts and use these skills well to strengthen their learning across the curriculum. Many pupils develop valuable fine motor skills, for example, by learning how to use scissors, drawing and letter formation activities. As pupils move through the school, a majority continue to develop handwriting skills that are appropriate to their ability.

Across the school, many pupils develop their numeracy skills well. In the foundation phase, many participate with enthusiasm during counting songs such as 'five little frogs'. They enjoy the action song and the valuable counting opportunities within the activity. At key stage 2, many pupils enjoy counting and colour matching activities whilst using the ball pool area within the school. A few pupils that are more able complete simple addition and subtraction successfully. These pupils are beginning to apply their numeracy skills effectively in real life situations, such as running the school cinema and selling popcorn during the film.

During their time at the school, many pupils develop a range of independence skills appropriate to their ability and in preparation for their secondary school placement. For example, pupils in the foundation phase develop skills in a range of personal care areas such as dressing skills and making simple choices at snack time. In key stage 2, pupils develop these skills effectively and strengthen their abilities to become as independent as possible.

In relation to their age and ability, many pupils develop useful thinking skills. For example, a small group of older pupils playing together made a boat for their game. Nearly all pupils have a clear understanding of classroom routines and use visual timetables throughout the school day. This enables them to understand and predict what is going to happen next.

Most pupils develop their creative skills well, and many enjoy exploring different media, such as printing, cutting, and messy art activities. The development of pupils' ICT skills across the curriculum is inconsistent.

Most pupils develop an appropriate understanding of basic Welsh words and phrases. Those who are able respond to simple questions in Welsh and take part in songs.

The beneficial progress that most pupils make during their time at the school across a wide range of skills effectively supports the next stages in their education. However, a few pupils with very complex needs do not make consistent progress across all learning experiences, in part due to the lack of relevant learning experiences appropriately matched to their levels of need and ability.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Nearly all the pupils arrive at the school each day ready and happy to learn and most settle quickly in their classrooms. Most pupils feel safe at school and know who to go to when they have concerns. Many pupils engage positively in activities throughout the school day, for example by taking part actively in registration periods, where appropriate, and participating in small group discussions enthusiastically.

Most pupils follow visual timetables well and as a result they become accustomed to the routines and structure of the day. For these pupils, this helps them to manage their behaviours, respond to situations efficiently, and access the school curriculum successfully.

Over time, most pupils' concentration levels during their learning improves. They show an awareness and increased understanding of tasks, and become more confident with initiating communication with staff and pupils. However, for the few pupils whose needs are more complex, their ability to regulate and attend to tasks is not as developed consistently.

Most pupils enjoy regular outdoor and indoor activities where they learn to cooperate with each other and improve their physical skills, for example through weekly yoga sessions and nearly all pupils participating in the 'daily walk' activity. As a result, pupils' behaviour and engagement in learning following the regular exercise improve. Older pupils are developing a particularly secure understanding of the importance of physical activity. They discuss feeling healthy and the impact of physical activity on their body.

Many pupils make healthy choices when choosing their snacks in breakfast club and during lunch time. Where appropriate they use symbols or verbalise their needs clearly and confidently.

Many pupils enjoy learning about their role as citizens in the wider world. For example, through a number of whole school events such as Water Aid week, Fairtrade week and 'Banana Day'. With encouragement from staff and parents, many pupils experience a worthwhile variety of different foods and cultures.

During playtimes, many pupils participate happily in activities including riding scooters, trikes and using climbing frames. Nearly all pupils benefit from staff acting as good role models to encourage improved social skills. For example, staff often demonstrate the use of equipment and encourage pupils to share.

Across the school, most pupils are calm and happy throughout the day. They demonstrate good behaviour both in and outside of classes. As they progress through the school, many pupils develop highly effective strategies to manage situations positively and reduce anxieties, which previously may have resulted in incidents of challenging behaviour.

The school council is beginning to have a more active role within the school and pupil elections to select school ambassadors representing the wide range of needs of pupils at the school are at an early stage of development. Across the school, opportunities for pupils to contribute to the school community are limited.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

Working relationships between staff and pupils are exemplary. When combined with a high quality person centred approach to teaching, most staff reinforce key concepts well, which include strategies to promote independent learning and important life skills. These approaches have a very positive effect on pupils' progress, behaviour and wellbeing.

Many teachers and support staff have a very detailed understanding of pupils' needs. They use this information well to plan relevant and personalised learning experiences, which focus on purposeful, challenging, yet motivating targets. Nearly all teachers use a diverse range of helpful pupil assessments to set meaningful learning objectives in lessons which challenge most pupils appropriately. Most teachers and staff make successful use of the school's communication approaches to promote effective interaction with pupils. They use these techniques skilfully to ask a range of questions, which test pupils' understanding well.

Most staff teams work well together to ensure consistency in planning and the approach to pupils' learning. For example, staff have implemented high quality interventions and structured teaching successfully to help most pupils develop important communication and social skills. Staff manage transitions across the school skilfully using schedules, visual cues and songs. The opportunities for transition are constructed well by staff, which give pupils authentic and important learning opportunities. As a result, many pupils are well prepared to move around school and between activities calmly such as from a lively soft play activity into a more formal lesson.

Most teachers and support staff plan and deliver exciting and motivating lessons, which most pupils respond to well. For example, many teachers plan interesting lessons for outdoor learning which helps pupils take calculated risks in their learning

and builds their resilience very well. In a few cases, however, learning objectives and teaching activities for a very few more complex pupils do not engage pupils well enough and do not take enough account of therapeutic guidance. Occasionally this can result in a lack of challenge and pupil disengagement.

Most teachers and support staff make effective use of the school's well-developed assessment for learning strategy. This strategy rewards pupils for meeting learning objectives with a 'high 5'. Pupils display strong motivation to collect high 5 tokens and, as a result, most engage in learning and behave well.

The school has used its role as a Welsh Government Pioneer School to design an innovative, purposeful, child-centred curriculum. The school's sound, strategic approach to curriculum planning has involved contributions from most teachers. The curriculum is mapped robustly and effectively against the new requirements of a Curriculum for Wales and the Areas of Learning and Experience. Nearly all members of staff are energised by the school's revised, curriculum and talented middle leaders have worked assuredly to provide a clear, long term framework in order to respond effectively to the school's changing population or context.

The school's new and ambitious curriculum is at the early stage of implementation. Most teachers develop effective pupil profiles which link well to high quality literacy, numeracy and digital tracking and 'Learning to Learn' frameworks, which have been developed by the school. As a result, the target setting for pupils' individual education plans (IEP) is very high quality, personalised and challenging.

The school enhances the curriculum with effective enrichment activities, which are planned collaboratively by staff. For example, the engaging WW2 enrichment day immersed pupils in valuable authentic learning experiences. Additionally, the school's work with a national film project is extremely high quality. Pupils engage well with film making using creative use of building bricks, sequencing and character design. This work is a notable strength of the school.

The provision for the development of communication, pupil independence and independent living skills is a strength of the school. There are valuable and beneficial opportunities for older pupils to apply their knowledge and skills in real life situations in the local community. However, occasionally, not all pupils have access to these beneficial educational visits.

Most pupils receive regular opportunities to learn and apply literacy and numeracy skills in worthwhile contexts in lessons. For example, pupils use their literacy skills well to transfer first hand learning experiences of the weather to a tally chart recorded over the week. However, the provision for pupils to develop their ICT skills consistently across the curriculum is under-developed.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The Hollies is a very caring school that nurtures the wellbeing of its pupils exceptionally well. Staff know their pupils exceedingly well, and the school deploys them sensitively to support pupils' learning and emotional needs comprehensively.

The school uses a number of systems effectively to monitor the wellbeing and track the progress that pupils make throughout their time at the school. Leaders continue to refine these systems to provide a more accurate reflection of pupil progress. Staff work regularly with parents to identify suitable learning targets for pupils. These targets focus appropriately on developing pupils' communication and social skills and, where appropriate, developing sensory activities. Staff use home school diaries to good effect. They provide parents with daily updates on what pupils have enjoyed and learnt in school. However, these do not always provide valuable information for parents, such as what their children pupils have eaten. Annual reports are celebratory and provide parents with a very good account of pupils' enjoyment and participation in learning.

Nearly all pupils play an active role in constructing one-page profiles about themselves. These profiles capture well what makes pupils happy, their likes and how staff can best support them. More able pupils use ICT to very good effect to create profiles that are personalised to them with, for example super heroes or images of special interests.

The school has recently introduced one lunch sitting for pupils. This approach was introduced sensitively so that pupils become accustomed to eating and socialising with others. The school also makes appropriate arrangements for pupils whose sensory needs make eating and socialising in larger groups challenging.

The school works very effectively with a range of specialist services available to them. This effective partnership working supports the improvement in staff knowledge and skills across the wide range of pupil needs. Senior leaders regularly meet colleagues from health to review and plan for the wider needs of pupils. This has a positive impact on the wellbeing of pupils.

Visiting the dentist and doctors can create significant anxieties for pupils, particularly for those with autism. Staff at The Hollies provide pupils with very useful visual schedules to prepare them for these visits. Mr Potato Head, for example, simulates a visit from the school doctor. This approach helps in reducing potential anxiety.

The school provides parents with a range of useful opportunities and resources that outline clearly approaches used by staff. This includes, for example, training in autism, the curriculum, and the support available at The Hollies.

Staff use school assemblies and the personal and social education programme effectively to develop pupils' understanding of attitudes and behaviours. For example, pupils learn about important concepts such as friendship and forgiveness as well as the different faiths and practices of their school friends.

The school council makes a useful contribution to the life of the pupils and its work links well with learning activities. Members of the school council have identified the need to improve the outdoor learning environment and increase the range of resources for them to use. However, the school council is not representative of all pupils and its work is under-developed.

The school hosts a well-established after school and holiday club. During these sessions, pupils participate in a range of worthwhile activities including cookery, arts and crafts, and therapy.

The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils generally meet requirements, although the management of traffic around the school site requires improvement.

Leadership and management: Good

The headteacher has promoted a clear vision for the school based on the school's motto 'Learning to flourish'. Her vision focuses strongly on equipping pupils with the necessary skills and knowledge to manage their lives as independently as they can and lead happy and successful lives. This permeates all aspects of the school's work and ensures that staff across the school have a shared understanding of the purpose of their roles in supporting pupils' learning and wellbeing.

In the relatively short time since their appointment, the headteacher and leadership team have established a thorough understanding of the strengths and areas of development for the school. Senior and middle leaders work together effectively to evaluate the school's work and plan suitable improvements to the school's provision. For example, they have made beneficial changes to the school's curriculum, timetables, and pupils' IEPs to promote a highly person-centred approach to teachers' planning and learning. In line with this, the school has reviewed its systems for tracking pupil progress to ensure that they capture what is important for each pupil in relation to their individual starting points. Many of these initiatives are at an early stage of implementation and it is too early to evaluate their impact.

Leaders have developed effective arrangements to enable the smooth day-to-day running of the school. Regular meetings and the efficient use of the school intranet ensure that all staff are well informed about the work of the school and that they understand and fulfil their roles and responsibilities well. The school has recently strengthened its arrangements for leadership through the appointment of leaders for the foundation phase, key stage 2 and curriculum areas. This approach is helping to provide a sustainable distribution of responsibilities, develop staff skills and understanding, and promote team working across the school.

The school has strengthened systems to consult with staff and parents to inform its self-evaluation. This engagement has helped to improve important aspects of the school's work. For example, following feedback from parents, the school has made beneficial changes to its home learning pack. The school has suitable quality assurance processes to evaluate standards and provision and inform its development planning. They include regular staff meetings, lesson observations and the scrutiny of pupils' work. These activities provide useful information to identify relevant priorities for improvement, for example the quality and consistency of teacher assessment of pupils' work. In a few cases, quality assurance activities do not identify clearly strengths or areas for development to support further improvement planning.

The school has established beneficial partnerships with a wide range of organisations to improve the facilities at the school and extend the learning experiences available to pupils. For example, the school's involvement in a national

film project helps pupils to develop their communication and animation skills. The local authority outreach service, which is based at the school, provides valuable support for parents and carers of young children with autism, as well as for parents and carers with English as an additional language.

The school has suitable systems to manage the performance and meet the professional learning needs of teaching staff. Performance management targets for teachers link well to the school's strategic priorities and help identify the relevant additional training required to help them to fulfil their roles. Professional learning days are well planned, and ensure that teachers have valuable opportunities to meet, discuss, and reflect on strategies that support the school's areas for improvement. There are worthwhile opportunities for a few teaching assistants to observe practice in other special schools. However, a strategic approach to the performance management and professional development of teaching assistants is at an early stage of development.

The governing body has a secure understanding of the school's strengths and the challenges it faces. Governors receive regular and useful information about many aspects of the school's work. The chair and vice-chair of governors visit the school frequently. This enables the governing body to provide strong support for the school and an effective level of challenge in areas such as resources and health and safety.

Leaders manage the school's resources carefully. The headteacher and governing body monitor expenditure thoughtfully to support the school's strategic priorities. This approach has enabled the school to make beneficial improvements to the school's learning environment, for example the refurbishment of the school cinema, digital learning room, and development of an outdoor learning area.

Copies of the report

Before an inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from parent and pupil questionnaires and consider the views of teaching, support staff 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 lessons and undertake a variety of learning walks to observe pupils learning and to see staff teaching in a range of settings
- observe and speak to pupils at lunch and break times and at a sample of after-school clubs
- 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' 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 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 going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publication 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: www.estyn.gov.wales

© Crown Copyright 2019: This report may be re used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the report specified.

Publication date: 23/12/2019